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JOHN OF ENGLAND.

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

BY HENRY CURLING,

AUTHOR OF

“THE SOLDIER OF FORTUNE.”

Now powers from home, and discontents at home,
Meet in one line; and vast confusion waits
(As doth a raven on a sick fallen beast),
The imminent decay of wrested pomp.
Now happy he whose cloak and cincture can
Hold out this tempest.
A thousand businesses are brief in hand,
And heaven itself doth frown upon the land.

KING JOHN.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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JOHN OF ENGLAND.

CHAPTER I.

THE BANQUET AFTER THE BATTLE.

The King doth wake to-night, and takes his rouse,
Keeps wassail, and the swaggering up-spring reels;
And, as he drains his draughts of Rhenish down,
The kettle-drum and trumpet thus bray out
The triumph of his pledge.

SHAKESPERE.

IN the great hall of the strong castle of Mirabeau the English King sat with his nobles and the mother-queen, and feasted, after the recent conflict.

It was a gorgeous scene of revelry, rendered doubly picturesque and interesting from being held amidst the hurry of war, with the royal host and his guests, in all the excitement of

the recent strife, red-handed from the field of blood of a few hours before.

The great hall of the castle was a vast, thick-walled apartment, its gloomy space being partially illumined by the iron lamp, the flaring torch, and flambeau. Two enormous fires, also, blazing upon the capacious hearths, sent forth a deep ruddy glow upon the arms and armour of the warriors assembled, whilst the flames were reflected back from whole piles of harness and weapons, which, hastily cast aside, now lay cumbering the floor around, and almost impeding the hurried exertions of the various serving-men who assisted at the board.

John sat enthroned upon the raised dais at the upper end of the hall, beneath a canopy hastily constructed from the draperies that had been torn down from the tent of Arthur, which was everywhere covered with the Lion of England and the arms of Brittany. Queen Elinor was by his side, looking the fitting mother of such a son. Both wore the regal

look, and carried the awe of majesty in their countenances; but in both might be seen at a glance the fierce and wicked spirit which possessed them.

John was now in most exuberant spirits, which showed themselves in the loudness of his conversation, and the familiarity of his manners to all 'around, as he laughed, talked, and quaffed off huge goblets during the feast. The Queen also seemed quite as much elated; but her stern disposition seldom permitted her to be familiar, except with those of elevated rank, or such as were deep in her confidence. She served, when present, as a check upon her son's more indiscreet moods.

“An Atè stirring him to blood and strife.”

She, at the same time, possessed all the perseverance, conduct, and diplomacy, which John so much wanted. Like him, no compunctious visitings of nature could have shaken the fell purpose of Elinor, when once she was resolved upon the path to tread; but, unlike him, she always kept the goal in view. Her son's

vagaries frequently marred her projects, and rendered her deep schemes abortive; but, like Penelope, she began the web afresh, with most remorseless perseverance. John was her idol; and her opinion of his talents, his greatness, and his desert, was most extravagant. In her estimation, like Cæsar, he could do no wrong.

The dark features of the King became flushed to a deep red as he drained down goblet after goblet, and he shook back the curls of his black hair as he laughed wildly at some sally of the jester, who sat upon a low stool upon his left hand; whilst the arched apartment rang to the clamour, the buzz of many tongues, and the bustle of the assemblage.

Almost all the knights and nobles present sat at the board, as they had marched and fought, their helmets alone being doffed, and the dust and blood of the encounter hastily removed from their harness. But notwithstanding the hasty manner in which they had assembled, bright forms and fair faces were also to be seen at the feast. The ladies attendant upon

the Queen were there; and Bertha Daundelyonne, with several of the gentlewomen who had come from England with John's power, and who had arrived just after the battle.

Amongst the foreign nobles who were at the board, the peculiar beauty of the English ladies excited considerable admiration, and many hearts were lost and won ere the tables were drawn; but the surpassing beauty of the fair maid of Kent, the fair Bertha Daundelyonne, was the theme of every tongue. She appeared indeed, amidst the ladies present, like some descended goddess in all her charms. The rich glow of her island beauty, the cheek of cream, the faultless feature, the lips that never opened but to show the pearly teeth within, showed to peculiar advantage amongst the darker complexions, and shorter and thicker figures of the fair dames of Poiteau and Brittany.

Although the stern Elinor admitted few even of the high-born nobles of her son's court to familiar intimacy, yet there was one

whom every guest present held in estimation, and every knight admired and loved—the chivalrous Faulconbridge, who, admitted to a greater share of confidence than many of higher rank with the proud Queen, was on that day seated by her side.

There was indeed in the whole demeanour of the natural son of Cœur-de-lion so much that resembled his royal sire, that no one could for a moment doubt that “he came one way of the Plantagenets.” His outward form was “perfect Richard;” and although he displayed the joyous disposition and chivalrous bearing of the lion-hearted king, there was an absence of his sterner qualities. Faulconbridge, who in the field, or even but partially aroused, showed in an instant the teeth and fangs of the raging lion, was in peace gentle and tender of heart as the coyest maiden of the land. Moreover, so generous and unselfish was his spirit, that had he possessed kingdoms to lavish, he would have bestowed them as easily as he gave alms on the highway. Horse to ride and

weapon to wear was to the Bastard all that the wide world possessed worthy of coveting.

It was owing to the total absence of self in this young soldier, that he was so entirely beloved by the stern, ambitious, and grasping nobles around, whilst his companionable qualities, reckless gallantry, and handsome person, rendered his name familiar in every court in Christendom.

“Your Highness avoids the wine-cup,” he said, as the Queen poured out some of the pure element and drank it. “Methinks, after this day’s exertion and fatigue, a draught of pure wine without one drop of allaying water to qualify its virtues, were more grateful than thin potations.”

“The Plantagenet blood mounts quickly, coz,” returned the Queen, “without the aid of stimulating drinks. We of the broom-plant are easily excited, even on ordinary occasions. See, our son grows heated already after the day’s toil: we pray thee, when we retire,

remove thyself nearer to the King. 'Tis more than likely he may require thy friendly aid to-night."

"Fear him not, madam," said Faulconbridge; "he but makes a show of excessive hilarity in order to keep up the festivity of the hour."

"Call me grandam, coz," said Elinor, looking at Faulconbridge with all the kindness her stern features were capable of assuming. "Call me grandam. Thy day's service alone, thou true son of the Lion-hearted, would claim our gratitude, wert thou not so nearly of our kin."

"Nay," said the Bastard, laughing, "your royalty was but in a miserable plight this morning, to say the truth on't, when I first beheld you, cooped up in this hall. Not altogether so much at your ease as at the present moment."

"Did Elinor of Guienne shew in feature, complexion, or bearing, any tokens that she feared the danger with which she was surrounded?" enquired the Queen hastily.

“By the mass, no,” returned Faulconbridge, again laughing. “I were a lying knave to say so. I would every bearded cheek here could look unblanched upon death as I have reason to know your Highness can gaze upon the bare-ribbed monster.”

“Cousin,” said the Queen, laying her jewelled hand upon the iron arm of the gay young knight, “look around, and tell me what thou see’st.”

“I see the Majesty of England, surrounded by his chivalry,” said Faulconbridge. “I see the knightly and noble of our island. The bold barons of a land hedged in with the ocean. The faithful subjects of your royal son who have spread their banners in these foreign fields, and conquered in his cause.”

“Thine eyes deceive thee, cousin,” said Elinor, setting her teeth as she glanced along the board. “Thou see’st a nest of hollow-hearted traitors, many of whom will fall from their allegiance ere many suns have set and risen.”

Faulconbridge placed the goblet he was carrying to his lips untasted upon the board, and gazed upon the Queen as she leant back in her seat apparently lost in the deep thought to which her speculations had given rise.

“Your Highness is surely over fatigued to-night,” he said, “that you allow such phantasies to hold a place in your imagination. If ever crowned king looked upon the noble features of the true-hearted and the loyal, your son now sees around him such an assemblage.”

“Thou art mistaken, cousin,” returned Elinor. “Thine own truth makes thee unsuspicious of others. To no one but thyself would I give utterance to such belief. Only to thee, because I know thou hast no tongue but for our interest. Except the Knight of Daundelyonne, the faithful Hubert de Burgh, and some half a dozen others of lesser note, every man here will fall from us. Thou wilt live and see it, good cousin—aye, and much more. I, myself,

shall see much that were better unstaid to see ere I die, but I shall never see the fair fields of England again."

"Prophetic are thy words," said a low voice close behind the Queen's chair. "England shalt thou never again behold."

The Queen turned sharply round. "Ha!" she exclaimed, as she beheld a monk, whose cowl was drawn closely over his face, slowly walk away, "have we spies so near?"

Faulconbridge, who had not heard the ominous warning, again looked at the Queen. He concluded that the excitement of the day had somewhat fatigued her, and accordingly forbore to continue the exciting theme, but sought to divert the conversation to some other topic. There was a wildness, a sort of prophetic fury, in the stern majestic features of the Queen which depressed his spirits as he gazed upon her. He drained down another cup of wine, however, and quickly forgot the subject.

"What lady is that, Madam?" he inquired, "over whom yonder swarthy esquire, with the

evil name, seems to hang so devotedly, as he listens to her words?"

"The fair maid whom Walter Mauluc is holding converse with?" inquired Elinor.

"The same," returned Faulconbridge, "though I beg his knightship's pardon for mis-calling him an esquire. The King hath dubbed him, I remember me, for the ready part he took in the capture of your Grandson this day."

The Queen seemed to start at this allusion to Arthur's capture: she scowled upon Faulconbridge for the moment, but her glance fell upon his open countenance like harmless lightning, as he continued to gaze upon the fair features of Bertha Daundelyonne. "By Heavens!" he said, "she is the most radiant creature mine eyes ere looked on. I'll choose her for my mistress, and set her name in my prayers when I spur my courser in the lists."

"When you have learned it," said the Queen, "do so, Sir Knight. She is the daughter of one you know and value. I marvel you have

not beheld her ere this hour. Nay, I wonder you have never thought of achieving such a wife. She hath lands as worthy of coveting, as her beauty is rare. 'Tis the daughter of Sir Gilbert Daundelyonne—the Infanta, as she is called, of Kent.”

“Your Highness speaks jestingly,” returned Faulconbridge. “Thou know’st I am lord of these poor weapons I carry, and no land beside. What should such a beggar do wooing a wife? ’Twere shame to dream of such a matter: besides I am already wived.”

“I heard not of your nuptials,” said the Queen, laughing, “where dwells your spouse?”

“Here, in my scabbard,” said Faulconbridge gaily. “The only wife I shall ever wed, depend on’t. I hold but a poor opinion of the sex,” he continued. “Nay, I am perhaps over blunt to say so to your Highness, but truth is truth. Large lengths of seas lay between a certain son of yours and a lady-wife I could name, or *I* had not been at hand to assist your Highness in your need this day. The expe-

rience of my life hath shown me enough of woman. I shall not accommodate myself with a wife that is rich, depend on't, and for a poor one, that were indeed but a silly venture."

"Out on thee, for a rude companion," said the Queen, "thou hast slandered the whole of our sex for thine own mother's behoof."

"The gentle knight is nevertheless wise in his resolve," said Gondibert, pushing himself between the Queen and Faulconbridge. "Marriage is a marvellously prolonged engagement. We had ourself once a wife, and we repented of her all her life; heaven rest her soul! Many an old host, I know, would willingly exchange his yoke-fellow for a furred gown, or a nurse without a tongue; and for a young spendthrift soldier to wed is as deplorable as ridiculous."

"Thou art but a saucy knave," said Elinor sternly, for even the all-licensed familiarity of the chartered Jester she could ill brook. "Go to, sirrah, carry your ribaldry to some other mart: we like it not."

The amiable goodness of Faulconbridge, which descended in gentle showers of love and kindness upon the meanest of his fellow-men, could ill brook that stern majesty should dash the spirit of Gondibert, whom he knew and loved. His was the calm and constant sunshine of soul which illumines the breast of the really good man. "Nay," he said, "you must bear with my old acquaintance Gondibert : I could better brook your Highness should lend me a box on the ear, than treat him ill-favouredly. He is of reputation with your royal son."

Gondibert, however, was not the man to be put to silence by the frown of man or woman. Those who struck with the scabbard were sure to be hit, in return, with the blade. "There are more ways, sir soldier," he said, "of establishing reputation than one ; as the old adage speaks of killing cats. One road to reputation is the praise of such men as yourself—honest men. The other is quite as sure,—the abuse of rogues and wicked caitiffs.

The former is invariably accompanied by the latter: ergo, I am renowned in these wars, and shall thrive apace. But I pray you, Sir Knight, to answer me one question," he continued, looking towards Bertha Daundelyonne, who was at that moment engaged in conversation,—Sir Walter Mauluc and another knight, striving to win her notice and favour on either side; "which will a fair dame sooner forgive, a slight or a liberty? You see yonder dark-visaged Mauluc is emboldened by having had chivalry's imprint stamped upon his shoulder this day. He hath snatched the portrait of the lady from her neck, and returned the chain, but the picture is hidden in his breast."

"I am ill at reading the female heart," observed Faulconbridge; "I cannot answer thy query."

"Marry," said Gondibert, "the answer is before us. Yonder proud damsel, although she scorn the thief, is flattered by the theft. Had he but stolen the gold chain, and returned the picture, I would not answer for the conse-

quences ; she would have raised this knightly assemblage with her reproaches, and we should have had the poltroon hanged up to scare the daws that circle around the highest towers of this castle."

"Thou art a shrewd companion," said Faulconbridge ; "nought escapes thy piercing ken."

"Why, look ye," resumed Gondibert, "but a few weeks back we were peaceful sojourners by the white cliffs of Kent. Our lady, yonder, engaged to wed a young noble of those parts. Then came the roll of tucket, the blast of trumpet, and the hurry of war. The young Lord of Folkstone slighted the beauty,—and mark the return. Report speaks him slain in this day's hot contention. Doth she feel his loss ? Doth the minstrelsy which brays out from yonder gallery sound less sweetly ? Doth the homage of these cavaliers around appear less grateful ? Ergo, ladies can forgive a liberty, but never a slight."

"Ha !" exclaimed Faulconbrige, "hath Lord

Folkstone fallen? We saw him beside us in the thickest of the battle. I missed him not at the board until your words recalled him to my recollection."

"Heaven help us!" said the Jester, "for we seldom think much of helping each other. We walk in a continual fog, cousin; everything immediately around us is clear, but beyond the little circle of ourselves, all is mist."

"Nay," said Faulconbridge, rising, "I will give orders to search the field: the Lord of Folkstone may be but wounded, after all."

"Trouble not yourself, Sir Richard," said Gondibert; "the Knight of Daundelyonne hath done that already. He sent out some of his followers to scour the field around so soon as he missed his friend here in the town. But see, the King is deep in converse with the Lords Salisbury and Pembroke. There is one here beneath us, Sir Knight, but a few short feet from all this gaiety and revelry, whose state I feel for: who this morning thought to hold out his palm to be kissed by the nobles

around him, but who now finds his limbs fettered with ungentle steel. Prince Arthur,—he, I wager, is the subject of conversation amongst the guests there. Heaven help him, say I, for the lion hath his paw upon the poor mouse of royalty.”

The brow of the Bastard became overcast at the words of Gondibert ; he sighed, but made no reply to Gondibert’s speech. “Yonder Brabançon knights at the lower end of the board,” he said, “grow noisy in their cups. See, Queen Elinor takes the hint and rises.”

John arose as she did so. “I shall hold conference with your Highness ere I retire,” he said, as she passed out at the door at the upper end of the hall. “In one hour expect me in your apartment. I come alone : we have matters of deep import to confer of to-night.” The Queen bowed and passed on, attended by her maidens and the rest of the ladies.

As Bertha Daundelyonne passed, the King stept a pace or two towards her, and stayed

her progress for a moment, addressing a few sentences in a low tone in her not unwilling ear. "We find ourself, beauteous Bertha," he said, "in the presence of that resplendent sun of beauty, which dazzles all eyes, and yet the cares of state hinder us from enjoying its rays. The meanest of our followers hath this day been happier than ourself. Will the lady Bertha grant her captive knight an interview in the pleasaunce to-morrow at dawn?"

"I am in attendance upon your royal mother," returned Bertha, proudly. "Your Highness best knows how she might approve that one of her maidens taking the air so early, and so accompanied. But, in truth, I like not the raw air of daybreak, my liege; permit me to pass; your Highness hath drawn the eyes of all the assemblage upon us."

"Ha!" said the King, drawing back and permitting Bertha to pass on; "but we shall find a way to lower that proud spirit, and make it fly an ordinary pitch."

"We drink one more round," he exclaimed,

throwing himself back in his oaken chair, "to the fair damsels who have graced our board."

" 'To the royal lady who hath honoured the feast with her presence,' " cried Lord Salisbury rising, followed by the whole assemblage, " 'To Elinor of England.' "

The warriors drained their cups, as the kettle drum and trumpets sounded out a martial flourish.

" 'To the grace and ornament of society,' " said the King, again rising. "Fill high the cup, lords, and drain it to the dregs, for never was there a more beauteous subject pledged. 'To the exquisite and unmatched, the lovely Bertha Daundelyonne.' "

The revel now "grew fast and furious;" though John, unlike his usual custom, kept himself a good deal apart from the assemblage. He sat back in his chair in deep and earnest conversation with Sir Walter Mauluc and a Brabançon Knight. Deep thought was on his brow. At length he sent Mauluc to desire Faulconbridge, who was now revelling at

the lower end of the board, to join him. "Cousin," he said, "we need your services; you must for England speedily. We shall ourselves be there before long; but ere our coming, we commission you to raise money amongst the clergy. The fat abbey-lands must furnish forth gold for these wars. You understand us, coz? Let not the lazy drones evade you, but rout out their hoarded treasure."

"Your Highness shall be obeyed," said Faulconbridge, rising. "I leave Mirabeau this night. The monks shall speedily pray for your Highness."

"'Tis well," observed the King, glancing after him. "Our life on't, two purposes are served. Our cousin despises the clergy from his soul, and will squeeze the chest of those hoarding abbots without remorse; meanwhile we would not have him present here at this time. Ha! said I not wisely, Sir Mauluc?"

"Your Highness hath acted with your usual wisdom," answered the Poitevin, bowing.

"Could we manage the matter discreetly,"

said John, again addressing himself in a low voice to his two companions, "could we contrive to get the damsel of Brittany into our power, we might then, indeed, sleep in more security."

"My life upon't," said the Brabançon, "if your royalty empowers me to treat with the persons I have named, and will indeed furnish me with sufficient gold, I engage to transact the matter to your satisfaction."

"I swear to thee, Sir Knight, upon the honour of a King."

"Pardon me, my Lord," said the Brabançon; "the strongest oath is not binding with me. I am slow of belief in most matters; but as I believe your Highness wishes for the custody both of the brother and sister in this matter, and will really furnish me forth, I undertake the commission. Always providing that, as I run my neck into danger in your service, you permit me to suggest the mode in which the money shall be forthcoming on the delivery of the princess into whichever of your royal castles

in Normandy it shall please your Highness to direct."

"Manage it as you will," said the King, "so it be done; I am satisfied."

The conversation was now carried on in an under-tone between the triumvirate, and the King soon afterwards arose and left the hall.

After the King had retired, Mauluc and the Brabançon remained where they had been holding conference with him, and continued for some time in earnest conversation. Many of the nobles, on the departure of John, had also retired, and the company was now divided into little knots or parties; some talking upon the events of the day; others still pledging each other from the wine-flask; whilst others again rattled the dice-box, and staked many a fair acre in England upon a cast.

Whilst the Poitevin and the Brabançon held a deep and earnest conversation, a monk, who had been seated beside the ample fire, arose and joined their party. He seemed known to them, although he wore his cowl drawn closely

over his features, for they offered no objection to his joining in the conversation.

Meanwhile, Gondibert, who had stalked about the hall uttering his conceits to the different parties around, appeared to keep his eye especially upon this trio.

“When three such pernicious caitiffs get together,” he muttered to himself, “it is said honest folks are likely to come to harm. I would I might catch a few words of that whispered villany.”

The Jester fetched a turn or two, as he said this. One minute he caressed a large stag-hound which was dreaming of the chase before the hearth; he then busied himself in examining a huge blade which lay near the place where the parties he had his eye upon were seated; and the next minute he appeared to be observing the throne which had been hastily constructed for the King, which was close by where the three were conversing. Presently he fidgetted himself into the throne, as if to try its comfortable seat, then he whisked out of it

and peeped behind; he then threw himself into it again, drew up his feet, and sat coiled up as if composing himself to sleep; quietly disposing the drapery over his person so as nearly to conceal himself.

The Jester had managed matters with so much cunning and discretion, and so absorbed were the trio in their conversation, that they had totally failed to notice his last manœuvre, and he sat quietly ensconced but a few feet from their whispered conference quite unsuspected—his eyes closed, his legs crossed, his hands clasped, and his ears open. The midnight bell sounded as the Jester sat motionless upon the royal seat, and still Mauluc and his companions held their secret council. Whilst by degrees, as guest after guest departed to seek their couches or quarters in the town, none but themselves were left, except some half a dozen knights who, flustered with flowing cups, sat with their heads leaning upon their folded arms and dozing at the end of the hall. At length, the trio seemed to

make a movement as if about to separate, and filled a parting chalice as they still lingered over their conference.

“So much, then,” said Mauluc, “is agreed on between us, and all goes thrivingly. Methinks thou ow’st me something, De Brabant, for the introduction I gave thee to the King.”

“It may chance to serve your own turn, Sir Mauluc,” remarked the other, “as this night’s conference hath shown. Should John, as you half suspect, conclude to play false with you in regard to the heiress of Daundelyonne, my castle walls may serve you at need. The fair maid of Kent once within the walls of Boislenoir and in your power, if she sue not to be wedded within twenty-four hours, I will consent to be flayed alive and hung up to the battlements as a scare-crow. The youth who was to have wedded her, you say, is put to silence; we need therefore fear no impediment in that quarter. How say ye that was managed?”

“I assailed him in the field,” replied Mauluc, “whilst he was aiding Faulconbridge to save

the Queen. I pierced him through the neck with my lance, when engaged hand to hand with Chatillon, and he fell in the midst of the *mêlée*, where he was doubtless quickly trodden into mud."

"Saw any one the deed?" enquired De Brabant.

"None that I wot of," said Mauluc; "besides I was myself at that moment unknown. My shield was broken and my crest riven off. Hark! what noise was that? Methought I heard something like a smothered laugh behind those hangings. Nay; 'tis but the wind piping in the chimney."

"'Twas well done," said the monk; "the young spark defied my wrath in my own walls of Salmstone. I had intended to have dealt with him myself, but thou hast saved my labour. Yet, hark thee, Sir Knight; one essential matter in which we are all three deeply concerned, you have totally forgotten."

The monk now spoke so earnestly and yet in so low a tone, that Gondibert, in his eagerness to hear the words, forgot his discretion so

far as to open the drapery and pop his head out, holding the curtains close under his throat, so that, in the dim light of the half-expiring lamps, he looked a most ludicrously terrific object—a sort of phantom of a bodiless head; and, as ill luck would have it, the stench of one of the flickering lights caused him to sneeze aloud.

“Atchough!” sneezed the Jester, to the no small amazement of the three. The monk was the first to catch a sight of the object, which at the first glance he concluded was the devil in person, and commenced telling his beads with amazing rapidity.

The Brabançon, too, was equally astounded; but Mauluc, who had an instinctive hatred of Gondibert, knew him instantly, and saw that most likely he had heard every word of their conference.

“Atchough!” again sneezed the Jester, as the Poiteven started from his seat and drew his blade.

“Ha!” he cried, as he whirled the weapon round his head and plunged it through the

curtain, and into the spot where the body of the Jester would have been had he remained to receive the thrust, "to the fiends with thee, thou meddling, prying, sneering caitiff; I have long vowed to reward thy impertinence with my rapier's point, and here thou hast it." As he spoke, Mauluc passed his blade again and again through the curtains of the throne, whose cushion gave a sort of sigh every time the weapon pierced it.

Gondibert, however, was too nimble to be thus caught. He had slipped down like an eel from the throne, and unseen, had ensconced himself beneath the table, where unbuckling the strong waist-belt by which his motley coat was girded, he passed it over the right and left legs of the Brabançon knight and the monk, and then emerging from beneath the board on the other side, made his escape.

"Thus perish all prying spies," said Mauluc, sheathing his sword, as he glanced down the hall to see that those at its extremity still slept. "I knew that knave and my blade would become acquainted ere long; best leave

the hall quickly, and it will be supposed he hath been slain in some brawl brought on by his ill-tongued jests."

"Your gown is entangled in my spur," said the Brabançon, as he and the monk hastily arose. "I pray you disengage it, lest I fall to the ground."

"'Tis my sandal, Knight," returned the monk, "which has caught hold of some part of thy harness. I pr'ythee disengage it with less violence, or I shall surely be thrown headlong upon the pavement."

"What devil's contrivance have we here?" inquired the angry Brabançon. "Thou art surely playing some trick upon me, Sir Priest. Now, by the blessed mother of Heaven, I'll brain thee with my dagger, unless you release my right leg from this vile thralldom."

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" shouted Gondibert, from the other end of the hall, where he stood beneath the arched passage, ready to vanish at a moment's warning,—“Ha! Ha! Ha!”

The Jester laughed so heartily at the scene

he had caused, that he awoke the sleepers at the end of the hall.

“Now the red pestilence strike thee!” said a half drowsy Breton knight; “is this a time for thy cursed jests? Begone, sirrah, lest I thrust thee hence.”

“Look ye, brother,” said Gondibert, pointing to the entangled monk and man-at-arms; “there’s Bigotry murdering Religion. I pray you step up and apprehend the culprit.”

“How is this?” said Mauluc, as he gazed in astonishment at the floundering pair, who now, fairly entangled amongst the stools and benches, in their violent efforts came clattering to the ground, the Brabançon beneath and the gownsman uppermost.

“Rise,” said Mauluc, angrily, who concluded that the pair had unaccountably fallen out whilst his back had been turned; “rise, and cease this unseemly struggle, lest I be tempted to spurn thee with my foot.”

But the prostrate friar finding himself un-

able to disengage his leg, and fearing the Brabançon would keep his word, thought it best to secure him whilst he had the advantage, and accordingly seized his opponent, and held him with all his might, endeavouring to pinion his arms to his sides.

The Brabançon upon this, more enraged than ever, plunged and struggled to disengage himself, and the pair fell to buffets with such strength and resolution, that the spectators, who had rushed to the upper end of the hall, were convulsed with laughter at the scene; in the midst of which the tables and chairs were overthrown; whilst Mauluc, scandalized at the whole affair, and conceiving that his two companions had suddenly become bewitched, hastily retired from the hall, and shut himself up in his chamber.

CHAPTER II.

THE BIRD IN A CAGE.

For, since the birth of Cain, the first male child,
To him that did but yesterday suspire,
There was not such a gracious creature seen.
But now will canker sorrow eat his bud,
And chase the native beauty from his cheek,
And he will look as hollow as a ghost;
As dim and meagre as an ague's fit;
And so he'll die.

SHAKESPERE.

K. Edwd. Bring forth the gallant, let us hear him speak :
What!—can so young a thorn begin to prick!
Edward, what satisfaction canst thou make,
For bearing arms, for stirring up my subjects,
And all the trouble thou hast turned me to?

Prince. Speak like a subject, proud ambitious York!
Suppose that I am now my father's mouth;
Resign the chair, and, while I stand, kneel thou.

Clarence. Untutor'd lad, thou art too malapert.

IBID.

WHILST the transactions we have described
in our last chapter were taking place, the

unhappy Arthur was shut up a close prisoner in one of the strong towers of the castle. 'Twas indeed but a thin court for the poor unflattered Prince, that strong room and the small attendance to which he was now reduced. Bereft suddenly of home, relatives, and friends, alone in the midst of his enemies, a prisoner, and in the hands of his bitter foe,—the portentous object of his infant fears,—the youthful Prince was almost without hope.

It was not precisely a dungeon to which he had been conveyed, and yet, although the apartment was used even by the knightly and noble as an occasional dwelling-place in those iron days, to the eyes of many in the present times it would have appeared but a cell for solitary confinement in some bastile. It was a small turret-chamber. One single arrow-slit alone admitted the light of heaven, and even that, narrow as it was, was barred with iron,—a small oaken table and one chair being the sole accommodation afforded.

The Prince was clad in the suit of chain-

mail and the embroidered surcoat in which he had been taken; his helmet was lying where it had been cast on his first entrance within this narrow dwelling. He sat, as he had for many hours remained since his capture, his head bowed down upon the table; and resting upon his folded arms, deep and audible sobs disclosing the deep emotion of his soul. He was not alone. As if the security of strong doors, iron bolts, and enormous walls, were not deemed sufficient for the stripling of eighteen, a mailed warrior, armed from head to heel, his drawn weapon in his hand, his beaver closed, stood immediately opposite, glaring through the bars of his helmet upon the hapless captive, as the faint light of the closing day gradually waxed fainter and fainter through the narrow embrasure of the prison:—a dark shadowy figure, masked in his impenetrable suit of mail, who by the royal order was shut up within the same chamber the young Prince tenanted; his guard, his spy, an evil eye upon him, even in the depth of his despair. To those whose veins bound

the rich blood of kings, the prison scene was frequently but a prelude to the grave, and well did the youthful Prince know that loss of liberty was loss of all. An ignoble death seemed to frown upon him in his narrow prison-house, whilst the sounds of music and revelry from the distant hall mocked the hopeless misery of his soul.

Suddenly he raised his tear-stained face, and gazed around the dark walls of his cell, fixing a long look upon the narrow opening on one side. It seemed to him that the clear fresh air of heaven had already been denied to him.

“My mother!” he said, “my poor mother! this will break her heart. She will die of grief.” A flood of tears relieved his overcharged heart as he again buried his face in his hands. Presently he raised his head, and rising from his seat confronted the dark form of the warrior before him.

“Fellow,” he said, as the spirit of the Plantagenet arose in his bosom, “who hath placed thee here?”

“I have my orders, my Lord,” returned the man, “from those who must be obeyed.”

“Art thou thus planted sentinel over me, wretch, in order to commit murder, when sleep overtakes my miserable eye-lids?” demanded the Prince indignantly.

“I have no such commission,” returned the figure.

“If thou hast,” said the Prince, “betake thee to thine office; I defy thee and thy weapon alike. I am unarmed, but I spit at thee; thou shalt find the Plantagenet will not die unavenged. I will tear thee, caitiff, and strew this cell with thy bones, if thou darest assail me where I stand.”

“Be composed, my Lord,” said the man-at-arms, “I am not here to harm thee. Thy safety is demanded at my hands. By the King’s order I am here, and should aught happen to thee, my poor life were worth but a small purchase,—I should be flayed alive.”

“Leave me, sir,” exclaimed the Prince; “I command it; I would be alone. If mine uncle hath placed thee here, I order thee to depart:

I, Arthur of Bretagne, King of England, lord over the usurping John, and all that he enjoys."

"I have not the power, even if I had the will, to obey you," said the figure; "I am as much a prisoner as yourself."

"I pray you, pardon me, good friend," said the Prince, stepping up and holding out his hand to the mailed warrior; "I have done thee wrong. Thou art unhappy in thine office, and I would it were in my power to release thee from it, for both our sakes."

"I would it were, my Lord," said the other, as he took the hand the young Prince had offered him, and carried it to his lips.

"Ha!" said the Prince, involuntarily; hope, on the sudden, rising in his breast, when he found his guard susceptible of compassion. "There is then a gentle heart within that iron shell. Good friend," he continued, again approaching the man, and seizing his hand, "are there no means of escape?"

"None," said the man-at-arms. "Twice fifteen thousand English hearts have followed in thy royal uncle's train, to compass the work

this day hath crowned with success. Bethink thee, Prince, for a moment, and then reckon the chance thou hast of escaping from the midst of such a host."

"I have friends more powerful than John, who would aid us," observed the Prince. "Could I but once again find myself free. I could make thee great beyond thy fondest hopes. Thou shouldst live the cherished friend, the deliverer of a Prince; a mother's and a royal sister's blessing should attend thee. Philip of France would heap honours upon thy head, so thou but showed me some means to escape this horrible captivity."

"'Tis of no avail," said the other; "I cannot aid thee, if I would. The bare attempt would but insure to thee harsher usage, and for myself death under unheard-of tortures."

"I have reason to know," resumed the Prince, "that my cruel uncle is hated by one half of those who have this day stricken on his side,—that his cruelty, injustice, and tyranny, are daily losing him hosts of friends."

"I may not deny the truth of your words,"

said the sentinel. "The issue of this day's battle and your own ill fortune, have, however, rivetted the loyalty of many who might have fallen from their allegiance to your Highness's favour, had the day gone otherwise."

The conversation of the captive Prince and his companion was at this period interrupted by the opening of a small door, which was so artfully contrived that in the gloomy light of the turret chamber it was not easy to discover its whereabouts, unless previously known, and being painted in imitation of stone it appeared a part of the thick wall.

The small door, however, now gently and noiselessly revolved upon its hinges, and stepping down from the winding steps which were cut in the thickness of the wall itself, some half a dozen armed men, the foremost of whom carried a lamp in his hand, entered the apartment.

The second person who entered the turret chamber was a tall and majestic-looking man, his dark and somewhat sullen countenance bearing the awe and dread of majesty upon it.

A short dark moustache covered his upper lip, which curled with an ever-during sneer, and showed to advantage the pearly teeth within, whilst his beard, which was suffered to grow entirely round his chin, was worn unclipped, to about an inch in length. He wore a surcoat over his armour, on which the rampant lion was blazoned from seam to seam. It was John of England. Of the five persons who accompanied him, four were his personal attendants; the fifth was Hubert de Burgh.

The King advanced a pace before the others, who halted so soon as they entered the turret chamber. He gave one rapid glance at the Prince, and then turned sharply upon the armed sentinel.

“We are well served in thee, thou caitiff,” he said sternly, “who talkest treason even in the heart of our fortress. ’Tis well we possess the means of detecting the opinions of such politic knaves as thyself. Go, bear him hence,” he said, as two esquires suddenly, at a signal, seized upon the man, and held him firmly. “Let his head be struck off upon the

battlements as a terror to all who palter with the prisoners they are placed to watch."

"Nay, I pray thee," pleaded the Prince, recovering from the surprise the sudden appearance of his dreaded uncle had first excited, "I pray thee, let not the fault I myself have caused be visited upon this soldier. Believe me, he hath said nothing but what I have wrung from his unwilling lips. He is true to thy service,—true as the steel he carries."

"Hence!" exclaimed the King impatiently, pointing with his hand to the door; "hence with the foul-mouthed traitor; he shall die, were he of our own kindred."

"Thus perish all who serve a cruel and a wicked tyrant," said the man as he was led out.

"Arthur of Bretagne," said John, as soon as the iron door was closed, "we have descended from our state to visit thee in thy prison-house, because we would fain be to thee a friend rather than an enemy. Yonder

knave hath in so far told thee rightly: thy estate is desperate. Thou art in the power of him thou hast deeply wronged—thy lawful sovereign.”

“ ’Tis false!” replied the youth, rearing himself proudly before his uncle, and interrupting him. “ ’Tis false! I never wronged thee. ’Tis thou who wrongest me, who enjoyest the lands I inherited at my birth. England was Geoffrey’s, and Geoffrey was my sire; what right hast thou to usurp my kingdom, and hold me here a prisoner in this dungeon?”

“Thine is indeed but a narrow kingdom,” returned John, glancing round the apartment, “wherein to arbitrate the question of my right.”

“The fouler crime is thine,” answered Arthur, “thus to lodge me.”

“My possessions, cousin,” returned John with a sneer, “proclaim my right; a right thou art far too shallow and feeble to overthrow. Nay, even backed by France and all her power, the pretensions thou hast set up

to the throne of England have flown like so much thistle-down before the tempest."

"I would our rights might be settled in the lists," observed Arthur scornfully, "face to face."

"Enough of this," said John impatiently. "I came not here to argue the question of right with thee, boy; that were indeed ridiculous. Hubert," he said, turning to his attendants, "remain; and do you, De Bossu, await us above; we have matter to discuss here of a private nature with our cousin."

The men bowed and withdrew, leaving only Hubert de Burgh with John and the young Prince.

"'Tis but waste of time, cousin," said John, again addressing the Prince, "for thee and me to wrangle of our rights. I have visited thee this night to tell thee of the hopelessness and folly of your pretensions. Resign them at once. Be our cousin, our friend, and ally, and in the plenitude of our affection we will grant thee more, much more than the hand of France,

backed as he is with hollow-hearted allies, could have ever hoped to gain thee."

"My life sooner," replied the Prince firmly, his soft blue eye flashing with anger. "Ere I consent to dishonour myself by such a deed, I will embrace the cruellest fate thy iron heart hath power to inflict. England, Ireland, Poitou, Anjou, Touraine, and Maine, are mine, mine in the sight of all the world; and I were base, dishonourable, and a stain to the knight-hood I profess, did I consent to relinquish my right to them."

"Ha!" exclaimed John, his brow growing black as midnight as he marked the spirit of his nephew. "This is indeed a dangerous shoot from the parent stock."

"I scorn thy proffered friendship," continued the aroused youth. "'Tis for me to forgive and offer friendship; me, thy nephew and rightful sovereign."

"Thou refusest, then, my proffer of alliance and friendship, boy?" observed John, smiling scornfully at the Prince's outbreak. "Thou

refusest to resign thy pretensions and accept of love and favour at our hands?"

"I do," replied Arthur; "I scorn thine offer."

"Think of thy mother, boy," said John sneeringly.

"She would trample upon such offers," returned the Prince, "as I tear and trample upon this senseless gaud." As he spoke, the enraged youth tore the embroidered scarf from his shoulder, and stamped upon it with his iron heel.

"Alas, I do but rave," he said, as he stooped and took the scarf from the floor. "The lovely queen of Philip scarce thought I should thus use the scarf her fair fingers embroidered for me. Sweet princess, forgive me, for I have need, heaven help me, of thy pity now."

The youthful Prince, with the changeful mood so common at his years, forgetting for the moment his resentment in the feelings the sight of the scarf had suddenly conjured up, together with the affection he entertained for the beautiful creature who had wrought it, and

who had promised him victory and triumph as she placed it over his shoulders, now stood apparently lost in thought, and, as he pressed the gift to his lips, the tears

“Coursed each other down his innocent cheeks
In piteous chase.”

The eye of John marked the change, and he once more essayed him in his softer mood.

“We offer thee fair, cousin,” he said; “be advised, and consider well, ere you reject our proffered friendship and alliance.”

“I have answered thee,” said Arthur. “Did I think my tongue could syllable the words conferring coronets upon thy head and dishonour upon mine, I would tear it from its babbling cage and cast it at my feet. Begone, and leave me to myself; death were preferable to a life of shame.”

“Ha!” said John, as his hand stole towards the dagger at his girdle, “say’st thou?” His eyeballs rolled for a few minutes while he meditated violence, but as his glance met the steady gaze of Hubert, his brow became more contracted, and his eyes sought the ground.

The Prince, meanwhile, stood unmoved before him. He beheld the dreaded uncle whose name had been his infant fear—the bugbear of the nursery,—the powerful John of England, his hereditary foe,—he beheld this dreaded enemy sink into a mean, pitiful villain, whose glance quailed before his own steady and undaunted gaze.

The King stood for a brief space with his eyes rivetted upon the damp stone floor of the chamber, the forefinger of his right hand pressing against his lips: he then gradually raised his head, gave one scowl of concentrated hate at the fair features of his graceful nephew, and signing to Hubert to follow, hastily left the chamber by the way he had entered, and closing the iron door carefully behind him, the unhappy Prince was left in solitude and darkness.

The ascent from the tower led to a vast apartment situated about the centre of the keep of the castle. It was hung with arras, and cumbrously yet splendidly furnished. A fire blazed upon the ample hearth, and the

coats of arms of knights and barons of former days were carved and blazoned around. Of the gorgeous trappings and splendour of feudal times there was plenty; of the comfort of modern days there was none. The lamps flared upon the massive table in the streaming draught which was admitted through the windows at either end, and whilst the proud banners of ancestral chivalry hung from the roof, the floor was strewn with rushes. Yet this was the apartment of the mother queen—of Elinor of Guyenne.

The Queen was quite alone and seated beside the table when the King and Hubert entered. Her stern but piercing eye sought her son's glance as he advanced, Hubert remaining at the entrance of the apartment. "How now! my son," she said, as John seated himself on a stool placed opposite her, and turned his eyes upon the crackling logs upon the hearth. "You have failed?"

The King turned his face towards her, but made no reply.

"I knew it," said Elinor, interpreting his

glance, "I foretold that the ambitious Constance had too well tutored her darling. She hath so long promised him a crown, the boy will not relinquish it but with life: a fearful and bloody arbitration must ensue."

"Hubert," said the King, "remain within call. Let no one interrupt us; we would confer on matters of import for a brief space."

The deep and dangerous conference of the royal pair was brief as it was important. What it was, indeed, the dark arras and stone-built walls alone could have revealed, for no living ears but their own ever received confession of its purport. But its secret whisperings boded ill to the captive son and widowed Constance. As soon as it was ended, the King arose from his seat and himself trimmed the lamp which was placed on the table, as his eye passed over the gloomy apartment. He then called aloud to Hubert and bade him enter.

"Good Hubert," he said confidingly, "we have reason to know thy truth and loyalty.

To-night we have more need of thy service than in all the fore part of our reign. Thou must to horse with all speed, good friend. We would have thee leave Mirabeau secretly and suddenly. A strong and sufficient force will attend upon thy safety. Arthur of Bretagne travels in thy charge."

Hubert started, and glanced from the King to Elinor; he then bowed his head.

"And my destination, my liege?" he said.

"The strong castle of Falaise," answered John, turning from Hubert's steady eye, and pacing up and down the apartment. "Yes. The strong castle of Falaise."

"We have here," continued the King, stopping as he placed his hand upon a packet lying upon the table, "an intercepted letter, by which we learn that Philip lies before Arques. Our drums shall sound in his ears, ere report of this battle reach him; away then, good Hubert; to thy conduct and tried fidelity I commit this business;—we would not have our nephew with us on this march."

As Hubert bowed and withdrew, the King

summoned an attendant and bade him desire the immediate presence of Walter Mauluc.

“Thou wilt immediately prepare for the road, Sir Walter,” said the King; “Prince Arthur travels under strong guard in Hubert’s charge. Thou wilt accompany the party, and keep thyself in immediate attendance upon the prisoner. Should there be an attempt at rescue, the Prince must not be suffered to escape. You understand me? drive your dagger to his heart at the first symptom of a surprise. Enough: William de la Bray goes with thee. Farewell! Fidelity will ensure promotion.”

The black-browed Poitevin bowed and withdrew to make preparations, and the royal mother and her son were once more left to their own counsel.

The clouds of night had for some hours descended upon the town of Mirabeau, and the citizens, together with that portion of the English army crowded within its walls, were buried in deep sleep. The bustle of armed thousands, and the turmoil of war had sunk down into silence, one solitary light flashing

occasionally from window to window in the upper apartments of the huge dark keep, alone proclaiming to the sentinel as he paced the ramparts, that the watchful eye of care which renders the night "joint labourer with the day," still kept vigil in the royal apartments.

"Is all quiet here?" inquired the officer of the guard coming up with a few file, as he made his rounds along the walls. "Quite so," replied the sentinel, as he started on hearing the question, having been so intent in watching the passing shadows which continually moved backwards and forwards in the apartment above, that the guard had approached him almost unobserved.

"Keep stricter watch here, sir knave," said the other. "What light is that above?"

"'Tis in the King's apartments," replied the sentinel, "I have been observing it. Those two shadows have passed and repassed any time these two hours."

"Heed them not, sirrah," returned the other, "keep good watch townwards. Has any one passed on your post here within the last hour?"

“Several,” replied the sentinel.

“Who were they?” inquired the officer; “of course they had the King’s private signal?”

“Marry, had they,” said the soldier, “or they would have tasted cold steel. Sir Hubert de Burgh but now passed down towards the stables, with Sir Walter Mauluc not a quarter of an hour back. There is some stir too on the other side the castle. I think a troop is getting to horse there. Now, if I might venture an opinion, I should say the royal captive has been removed from the tower near my beat. I saw a large party in charge of a prisoner descend the terrace steps.”

“Go to,” said the serjeant; “thine eyes are quick enough to spy out what thou hast nothing to do with, but over slow to observe that which they ought to see! An’ I catch thee slumbering upon thy post again, thou shalt feel the weight of my lance, and taste the dungeon beneath the swan-tower.”

The officer’s reprimand was suddenly cut short by the sound of a large body of horse leaving the court-yard of the castle. They

clattered through the gate-house, and took their way beneath the outward walls of the fortress, sounding fainter and fainter, as they made for one of the city gates. They were there challenged by the warder, when a tall and stately-looking knight galloped up to the front, and gave the word,—“John of England.”

He then leant from his courser, and held brief conversation with the captain of the gate-house; after which, the iron-studded gates were quickly opened, the portcullis was drawn up, the drawbridge lowered, and the dark mass of horsemen filed beneath the arch, into the open country—a long line of cavaliers at least two thousand strong, the flaring cresset which the gate-house porter held aloft as he stood within the archway, glancing in flashes of flame upon their chain-mail, as they passed.

Quickly and regularly they filed through the gateway, and over the bridge; the leader sitting like a pillar of iron, to peruse them as they passed out. He then galloped up to the centre of the party, and reined his steed be-

side a horse-litter which was strongly guarded in the midst, and bidding the cavalcade move onwards at a brisk pace, they quickly vanished in the gloom, taking their way over the field which had been the scene of strife but a few hours previously.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIELD OF BLOOD.

Lucius. Soft, ho! what trunk is here,
Without his top?—

How! a page!—
Or dead, or sleeping on him?—

Thy name?

Imogen.

Fidele.

Lucius. Thou dost approve thyself the very same:
Thy name well fits thy faith; thy faith thy name.
Wilt take thy chance with me? I will not say,
Thou shalt be so well master'd; but, be sure,
No less beloved.

SHAKSPERE.

WE must now return for a brief space, to
the field near Mirabeau.

The battle had swept through a small orchard which lay to the left of Prince Arthur's camp. A severe encounter had taken place here between a large body of French chevaliers

and some of the Kentish men. The Daundelyonnes, father and son, had led the charge, which had been received by the French just at the edge of the orchard. The contest had been a deadly one, the combatants having fought with great animosity for some hours. The youthful page whom we before left in charge of the wounded knight, after watching the distant party of horsemen in the vain hope of being able to make them aware of one of the party being still alive upon the field,—for he plainly distinguished the banner of the Daundelyonnes fluttering in the blast,—turned his eyes upon the orchard, which lay about a couple of bow-shot from the spot on which the young Lord of Folkstone lay. Could he but manage to bear the wounded knight beneath the sheltering boughs of the trees in the orchard, it would be better, he thought, than allowing him to lie in the bleak winds which swept over the open plain.

The sharp night air, however, was beneficial to his charge, inasmuch as it froze and clotted

the blood upon the wound, and rendered more secure the bandage with which it had been bound.

After awhile, the knight revived under the page's care, and gazed earnestly in his face, as he sat supported in the youth's arms.

"Art thou some vision," he said, "or is it indeed true that I behold the face of one I have long thought dead? Tell me, fair boy; we have met before, in other lands. Thou art not what thou seemest."

The youth smiled, and placed his finger on his lip. "You must remain quiet, my Lord," he said, "unless you wish your wound to open afresh. Ask no question of me now. We have a long night to endure upon the wold, unless succour comes, which now I think is hardly likely."

Whilst, however, the young knight continued to gaze upon his preserver in the clear moonlight which slept upon the open field, he became more and more convinced, now that he saw the countenance of the page displayed

without the hood which had before hidden it, that he was tended by the lovely girl he had rescued from the hands of a savage mob in England, and whom he had so long thought dead. A faintness overcame him as he endeavoured to rise, and reach the orchard towards which the page pointed, and as he felt himself supported upon the soft bosom of his attendant, his suspicions were still more confirmed.

“Remain not with me here, fair creature,” he said, “you will perish in this bleak air. I pray you make your way towards the town, and provide for your own safety. Believe me, I am too much hurt to survive.”

“Could I be assured you would not be molested in my absence,” returned the page, “it were perhaps better to seek some of your followers, and procure assistance.”

“For your own sake,” said the knight, “endeavour to gain the city walls, or some shelter.”

The youth hesitated. It was necessary that something should be done. He looked

around in doubt ; when between himself and the wood he beheld a dark troop, like a pack of hounds, their noses upon the ground, come sweeping towards them.

“Ha !” he exclaimed, “lost ! lost ! I see the wolves upon our trail.”

As the ravenous beasts came on, however, the distant gallop of steeds was heard upon the plain. The wolves stopped at the sound, uttered a deep-mouthed growl, and swept off out of sight, their yapping cry coming down the wind like that of dogs in full chase.

Meanwhile, the hollow sound of hoofs upon the turf became louder and louder, and presently a plump of spears, and a knight’s pennon, were seen in full gallop at a short distance from them on the right. The heart of the page now beat high with hope, but it was soon dashed. The party would evidently shoot past without nearing them. The young lord took his bugle from his side, but a faint and wailing blast was all he could wind upon it. The page tried to sound a few notes, but failed of making it utter a single note.

“Methinks I should know that rider yonder,” cried the Knight, as he gazed upon the party, which as they swept along in the distance, were not only easily to be distinguished; but the joyous laugh of their leader, and even here and there, a word were to be caught.

“I cannot be easily mistaken in yonder rider,” said the Knight, “although it is impossible in this light to discern the device upon his shield and banner.”

“Many lying around us, here,” said the page, “were this day stricken by his powerful arm. It is the brave champion who rescued the Queen at the moment you yourself were struck down. I would we could attract his notice.”

“It is, indeed,” said the Knight; “there rides one possessing the noblest heart and strongest arm in Christendom. ’Tis the gallant Faulconbridge.”

It was in vain that the page made every effort to engage the attention of the party. They galloped rapidly past, and the hoof-

tread of their steeds soon died away in the distance.

As the night grew colder, the page stripped some of the gorgeous trappings from a wounded charger which lay groaning beside them, and covered the Knight partially with them. Suddenly, after some hours had been thus passed by the page in listening to the long-drawn howl of the wolf, and the sharp cry of the hill-fox, he became aware of some figures prowling towards the spot. The convent-bell from the distant tower was plainly to be heard, as the page, bending all his energies, listened to and watched the approaching figures. At first he thought that assistance was at hand, but a short time served to undeceive him, and proclaim the real character of the comers.

When they reached a spot distant about a bow-shot from him, and where likewise several of the slain were lying, the page beheld them busily engaged in rifling the bodies of the fallen. One ruffianly-looking caitiff, who was accompanied by a woman carrying a large

wallet on her back, he distinctly saw in the act of despatching a wounded knight. He heard the deep execration of the helpless warrior as the murderous villain drove his blade through the closed bars of the helmet, after which he stripped the victim of his knightly chain, and whatever else of value was upon his person.

To the relief of the page, as his blood ran chill in his veins whilst he continued to watch the camp followers, and observe them in their vocation, he saw that the party separated in different quests, and only the man and woman with the wallet remained. They stood gazing for a few moments, and then marking the numerous bodies lying around the spot where the page was seated with the wounded Knight's head in his lap, they made towards it.

"Stay," said the female, laying her hand upon the man's arm. "Best reconnoitre yonder heap of carcasses; methinks I see some one moving."

The moon at this moment withdrew her light for a moment, and the pair were at fault.

The page set the Knight's head gently on the ground, and seizing a shield which lay beside him, arose and drew his sword, placing himself firmly before his charge.

"Ha!" said the ruffian, "I can now see some one standing amidst yonder heap of slain. Best retire and call up our comrades."

"Out on thee for a cowardly hound," said the female; "'tis but one wounded. What else would remain here in this bleak air? Wouldst lose or even share such a booty as yonder spot promises? Come, let me pass if you fear a ghost. I'll soon lay it, I warrant me."

The female drew a long dagger as she spoke, and moved a few paces onwards, followed by her companion, who was now ashamed to remain behind.

"What is it?" he whispered, as they once more stopped, and the moon again threw her light over the ghastly plain.

"Pshaw!" said the female; "come on, I say. Some horseboy who has remained beside the

body of his lord. In, man, and strike him down."

As the man beheld that it was indeed but a stripling he had to encounter, he no longer hesitated, but approached and confronted the page.

The page threw his shield before his breast, and without waiting for the assault bade his assailant stand off.

"Hence, villain!" he said; "seek some other prey."

But the murderous ruffian, still more emboldened by seeing that the youth he was about to encounter was not even clad in armour, vigorously attacked him.

The page, who, it appeared, knew something of the science of defence, received the assault without flinching, and managed, with the help of the Knight's shield, to protect himself from the blows his antagonist, with powerful arm, now rained upon him*, still

* Many of our readers will probably think this encounter somewhat overdrawn; we must, however, beg to observe, that in the middle ages such things were not rare. In the

keeping himself between his wounded charge and danger. The light blade he carried, however, added to the circumstance of his burly antagonist being clad in a rusty suit of half armour, rendered his defence at best but of questionable issue. The blear-eyed hag with the wallet also made the odds more great against the youthful champion. She stole round unperceived by the page, and approach-

Curiosities of Heraldry will be found the following passage: "The crest of Dudley, of Northampton, bart., was 'out of a ducal coronet, or, a woman's bust: her hair dishevelled, bosom bare, and a helmet on her head, with the throat-latch down, proper.' From a MS. in the possession of this family, written by a monk about the close of the fourteenth century, it appeared that the father of Agnes Hotot (who in the year 1395 married an ancestor of the Dudleys,) quarrelled with one Kingsdale about the possession of some land, when they agreed to meet on the debateable ground, and decide their right by combat. Unfortunately for Hotot, on the appointed day he was ill, but his daughter Agnes armed herself in his stead, and mounting her father's horse, repaired to the place of decision, when she succeeded, after a stubborn encounter, in unhorsing her antagonist. Loosening, then, the stay of her helmet, as he lay on the ground, and letting down her hair over her shoulders, and disclosing her bosom, she discovered to him that he had been conquered by a woman. This lady afterwards became the heiress of her family, and married a Dudley, whence the latter family derived their crest."

ing him from behind, meditated bringing him down with a stroke of her long poniard.

The youth held his own resolutely. 'Twas like coming between the wounded stag and the doe. There was danger in his true defence, and he bore his rapier point so truly before him, that he even wounded his antagonist and made him give ground. At this moment the hag succeeded in stealing round, and with poniard gleaming in the air was about to put the finishing stroke to the combat and the life of the page at one blow.

The consummation, however, was averted by the wounded noble, who, having been awakened from his deep sleep by the clash of weapons, beheld his preserver on the eve of death.

The sight nerved his arm and gave him fresh strength, and raising himself somewhat from his reclining posture, with his gauntletted fist he smote the fiendish female to the earth.

The Knight had been refreshed by his short repose, and he now succeeded in gaining his

feet, when he immediately hastened to the further aid of his youthful protector, and throwing himself between him and his assailant, with two strokes of his rapier, weak as he was, he brought the caitiff down.

The exertion, however, had been more than he could, in his wounded state, well bear; his wound opened afresh, and he fell bleeding once more to the earth.

The page, uttering a cry of despair, and forgetting his own safety in his anxiety for the young Lord of Folkstone, threw himself upon the prostrate body and again endeavoured to staunch the wound; whilst the ruffian, whose armour had saved him from the Knight's blows, leaped to his feet and approaching, once more raised his sword to smite the stripling. He was interrupted, however, before the weapon could descend upon the head of the devoted youth by a cry of alarm from the female—his companion—who, on gathering herself up to renew the attack, beheld the fluttering pennon of a horseman in full career, scarcely half a bow-shot from her.

The parties had indeed been so hotly engaged that, until that moment, they had not discovered the approach of a large body of horse, nearly two thousand strong, which thundering upon the turf came full gallop towards the spot.

As the ruffian turned at the cry of his companion, he was instantly aware of the circumstance. A single cavalier was in advance of the party which formed the advance-guard, and which, dashing full gallop past the spot, merely lowered their crests as they glanced upon the startled murderer whilst he stood in act to fly. The next moment, as he hesitated, on perceiving they held onwards without pause or enquiry, his ears were again saluted with the thunder of hoofs upon the turf, accompanied by the ringing sound of the main body, coming rapidly towards him.

“Down, Nell!” he said, as he stooped and hastily fled, like some scared bird of prey, across the plain. “Down, I say, and scour off, or you will be trodden into the earth in two minutes.” The page, at the same mo-

ment, ran wildly from beside his charge as he caught the ringing sound of the advancing cavalry. He tore off his scarf, and placing it on the point of his weapon, advanced a few paces and waved it in the air, as the foremost file approached the spot so nearly upon him that he seemed in danger of being ridden over by the whole cavalcade.

Suddenly, however, the stately Knight who rode in their front, threw up his right arm, and the word "Halt!" ringing out in the clear night air, the whole mass, their steeds thrown upon their haunches, stood like statues upon the plain. The leader then rode up to the page, and in a few words was made acquainted with the condition in which the young Lord of Folkstone lay.

"Sound out, De Mohun," he said, "and halt the advance, whilst we look to this matter. The young Lord of Folkstone lies here bleeding to death."

Thus saying, Hubert de Burgh, (for he it was who, together with his party, were escorting Prince Arthur towards Falaise,) leapt from his

steed and approached; he found that the wounded man still lived, for the page had again succeeded in bandaging up the wound.

“Who and what art thou, my poor boy,” said Hubert kindly, “who hast so faithfully remained beside this youth in his extremity?”

“I am a page of the Daundelyonne,” returned the other. “I pray you, Sir Hubert, grant me assistance to gain for this Knight some place of shelter.”

“Marry, will I, my poor lad!” replied Hubert. “I would every soldier had so faithful an attendant. But we may not tarry thus upon our march. Here, Robert d’Ashe, and you, Peter le Fauconier,” he said to two of his attendants, “dismount. Form a litter with your lances, and bear the young Lord of Folkstone to a cottage you will find on the other side the orchard we just now passed. Enforce a shelter for him there for the night, and inform the Knight of Daundelyonne of his estate at dawn. Desert my old Kentish acquaintance upon the open field in the

dead of night!" he said, after he had sprung upon his steed, and given the word to his party to move on. "No, that's not the practice with me. Farewell, good youth. If ever you need a friend, or change your service, seek out Hubert de Burgh." So saying, the leader turned his horse, and striking him with his armed heel, galloped after the departing horsemen whilst the page, assisted by the two men-at-arms, whose steeds he led whilst they bore the still-insensible form of the wounded Knight, made for the cottage which had been described.

The mishaps and adventures of the young Knight and his attendant were not, however, over for the night. Ere they reached the edge of the orchard, on the other side of which they expected to find the resting-place Hubert had pointed out, they were brought to a stand by an appearance which considerably puzzled the men-at-arms who conducted them. This was no other than a large animal which, in the uncertain light of the moon, seemed a huge beast of prey; and as it appeared to sniff

the air on the approach of the party, dancing its body from side to side as is the custom of some animals, it somewhat confounded the men-at-arms, and caused them to halt and reconnoitre it.

This startling object, which occupied the very middle of the road they intended to take, uttered a deep growl as soon as it espied the wounded knight and his attendants, and quietly slunk back within the shadow of the trees.

“What may this be, think ye, Robert?” said one of the men-at-arms. “By’r Lady, I like it not.”

“It looked more like a bear,” said the other, “than anything else, and yet I heard not of bears in these parts.”

“I never saw a bear,” returned the former; “nor should I fear a bear an’ I did see one; but for yonder rugged creature, I am doubtful it is not of this world, Robert. By the mass, I think it was the foul fiend himself in person.”

“I pray you heed it not, good sirs,” said

the page, anxiously, "but proceed with your charge, or it will be all too late. Bethink ye, the knight is sorely wounded, and this chill air strikes like death to one in his state."

"It is easy to say 'Go on,'" resumed Robert, "but methinks we should do more wisely to fetch a turn and avoid yonder pass; I like not entering the jaws of a wood where I have seen the devil holding a gambol not a minute before. Nay, by our Lady's grace, I can even yet see the monster in the gloom, crouching down in the very centre of the road."

"Nay," returned the other, "methinks I can see some three or four objects there. Look! you may see them lying just in the edge of the orchard within the dark shadow of the trees."

"An' I might pass unincumbered," said Le Fauconier, "I would take the chance; but to be pounced upon by some evil spirit whilst hampered with a wounded comrade is not so pleasant."

"Nay, then," exclaimed the page, "I will myself go forward with the horses, and take

the first chance. Bethink ye, to remain here is death to us all."

The soldiers, although they partook of the superstitious fears of the age in which they lived, were somewhat ashamed of being thus outbraved by a boy; they therefore took up the knight and proceeded a few paces. The page, however, found it impossible to move the horses a step to the front; they snorted, planted their feet firmly before them, and seemed inclined to break from their holder, rather than approach the wood.

This again startled the men-at-arms, and caused them to halt. "Our horses will not face the evil one," said Robert, "a sure sign I was right, and that the fiend is holding a revel yonder. By the mass, I like it not!"

"An I were mounted, I might find heart to face the fiend," observed his comrade; "at any hazard I could better reconnoitre yonder monster: methinks I should feel more assured if once in the saddle."

So saying, the man-at-arms, followed by his companion, in spite of all the unhappy page

could say or do to hinder them, set the wounded knight down, and betook them to their steeds.

Scarce had they done so, when some half a dozen rugged animals rushed from the cover of the orchard, followed by as many ill-looking men in rusty harness, and the horsemen, setting spurs to their steeds, left the knight and his attendant to shift as they best could.

At first, the faithful page considered their case a hopeless one, and that both himself and helpless charge would in a few moments more become the prey of the savage beasts now within a few yards of the spot on which he stood. As, however, he observed that the more hideous-looking monsters were accompanied by several human beings clad in rusty suits of harness, he suddenly recognised them as part of a band of outlaws which had for many years infested the woods and fastnesses of the country, and of whose existence he had heard when formerly in Poicteau.

This singular band, who were in the habit of clothing their scouts in the skins of wild

animals, and of assuming all sorts of disguises in their vocation, by their daring deeds, and wild acts of justice against some of the oppressive nobles of the countries they visited, had struck terror wherever they came; and scarce had the page time to recognise the band ere he was surrounded by them.

It was lucky for the pair that the leader of the outlaws was with this party, as they sometimes committed wild deeds when he was not present with them. Meantime, whilst those who were clad in the skins of animals remained aloof, and kept a look-out around, the captain and his small party pounced upon and examined their prey.

“What wounded Knight is this?” inquired the outlaw, “and whither bound with him?”

The page satisfied him in a few words.

“And yourself?” the chief inquired, “who and what art thou?”

On this point the page also quickly answered the outlaw, merely saying that he was a follower of the Daundelyonne, and at the same time entreating the captain to assist him in

conveying his wounded charge to the cottage they were in search of.

“That can I not do, good youth,” replied the outlaw, “since I may not put my followers in peril by approaching the town. The names you have mentioned I know; for I am English-born, and I will therefore befriend you in what I can, and take your comrade to our cave. I cannot, however, let you yourself go free; you are our prisoner, and must accompany us.”

“’Tis all I desire,” answered the page; and accordingly, after he had been blindfolded by the captain’s order, the wounded knight was taken up by four of the banditti and quickly conveyed from the field, the page being led after by another of the band.

Not far from the orchard, and somewhat on its left, there was a thick and tangled wood,

“Horrid with fern, and intricate with thorn.”

Into this the party plunged, and the page quickly found that after a short halt they were apparently descending into the bowels of

the earth. They were then placed in a boat and were rowed over a small stream, and after a short distance had been gained, they again came to a stand. Here the bandage being taken from his eyes, the page found they were in the centre of an immense cavern, which was only to be gained by narrow openings and outlets so numerous all around, that those who possessed not the right clue would be likely to lose themselves in endeavouring to find the real entrance. The roaring noise of waters proclaiming likewise that the subterranean stream they had crossed presented another difficulty to egress.

In the midst of this awful-looking subterranean hold several parties of the robber band were assembled. A bright fire was alight in a sort of natural hearth on one side, and the place was illuminated by several massive iron lamps, suspended from the over-hanging roof where it descended lower than ordinary, for in some places the rock ascended to so magnificent a height that the eye failed in penetrating its dusky elevation.

On further examination, as the page stood astonished in the midst, he discerned several sleeping-places well filled with dry fern, which he concluded were the couches of the banditti. Into one of these the captain ordered the young Lord of Folkstone to be conveyed, directing that his wants should be administered to.

“Your English John is making wild work here,” he said to the page, after he had attended to the immediate wants of the wounded noble. “It is not many of his Norman followers whom I would take so much trouble about as I have even now bestowed on yonder Knight; and if I could get the caitiff monarch himself into my dominions here, he should have but a short shrift and a tight cord I promise ye, for all his crown and royal blood.”

“Princes are more easily threatened than assailed,” returned the undaunted page. “Our English monarch is beyond the reach of your vengeance.”

“Make not thyself too sure of that, Sir Page,” returned the robber; “there be many have sworn to compass the death of the

tyrant, and I owe myself one of the number. I owe your King a long and heavy debt."

"Mashinka, thou art not wise in thus proclaiming your treason to a stranger," replied the page. "Bethink ye, if I were to relate what I have just heard on my return to Court, the vindictive King would scarce rest till he had smothered your band out of this nest, as they smother wolves from their dens."

"How know ye, bold Sir," returned the outlaw, "that thou wilt ever return? Look around thee here. Once fairly trapped in this cage, and even if life and liberty were offered thee, without assistance and guidance thou couldst never more regain the open world above."

"But men speak thee fair," murmured the page, "and call thee good in all but thy vocation. I have heard thy name sounded in other lands, and have even lived with those who have known thee in former years. Thou art the robber-chief whose name has struck terror to the wicked through all France and Normandy."

“Thou art right, my poor boy,” answered the chief, “and, in sooth, I would not harm either thee or the knight thou servest, since his name is known to me, and the place he dwells in is familiar to my eye. I am Saxon-born, and it does my heart good to hear the pure English you speak. But come, ’tis ill talking with one whose spirits are wearied with toil and fasting; we will find thee supper and a bed.”

“And how then,” said the page, as they moved towards the fire, to take their place at a table which some of the outlaws had spread for the captain, whilst he held converse with his youthful guest, “And how then hath our English king so deeply wronged thee?”

“By dishonouring my house,” said the outlaw; “by taking from me the light of mine eyes: my wife he took to be his favourite, my children he caused to be destroyed, my possessions he confiscated, and myself he banished from my native land. Nay, my very name, which was a knightly and noble one, ere his Norman ancestor brought his followers to England, has become, like that of

all true Englishmen, a scorn and a reproach; my family have been hunted, disgraced, and persecuted like the reptiles of the field for many generations, and now this vile John hath filled the measure of our wrongs. But mark me, youth," continued the outlaw, "you will live to see this despicable tyrant abhorred and accursed through all Christendom during life, and die the death of a poisoned hound at last. But enough of this," he said, repressing his emotion, as he seated himself at the rude table on which the repast was laid. "Thy bright English face and brown locks have reminded me of my deep griefs. Bring wine and fill," he continued, speaking in French to the attendant who waited; "and now, Sir Page, let us eat and fear not. 'Tis not often I am favoured with a guest from the white cliffs I love so well. 'Here's to the fair and fertile land of Kent,' from which you say your Lord last came. Nay, heed not the young knight yonder; we have those in our band well skilled in leechcraft, and if he is not too badly wounded, depend upon their care and attention." The chief now busied himself in assist-

ing his guest to such refreshment as was placed before them, which mainly consisted of venison from the forest without.

The page, however, declined the request of his host that he would altogether remove the hood which had partially concealed his features, and it was an assurance to him of the good faith of his entertainer, that the request was not altered into a command. Nevertheless, what the bandit could observe of the face of his guest seemed so much to interest him, that his gaze was often fixed upon the boy's countenance for several minutes at a time.

At length, he arose from his seat, and whilst winters of memory seemed to roll over his mind, paced up and down the cavern, often stopping to contemplate the page as he continued his repast.

"A follower of the Daundelyonne!" he said musingly, "and have you long served that knight, good youth?"

"Not long," returned the page; "I have served many masters in my time, and visited many lands."

“And thy name?” inquired the robber.

“Call me Chalamor,” said the page; “that is the name by which I am at present known.”

As the outlaw saw that the youth disliked his close scrutiny, he forbore the conversation, and suffered him to finish his meal without further question. In short the page found himself in better quarters than he could have hoped for, and whilst he refreshed himself at the captain’s board, could not but admire the regularity and order with which the band seemed to be managed. Parties ever and anon came and went, scouts in most fantastic habits continually brought messages, and made report of proceedings without, whilst others in the disguise of peasants, were despatched on various missions by their chief.

The recent siege of Mirabeau by the army of Prince Arthur, and the wild contention and discord attendant upon it, had proved a rich harvest for the outlaw chief, whose band was so numerous and well organized that they held posts and detachments in various parts of France, Normandy, and Brittany, besides

their present haunt: so that when they found one part growing too hot to hold them, they not unfrequently disappeared in the most unaccountable manner, and as suddenly commenced a fresh campaign in a far distant quarter. It was somewhat curious, that at this period the virtues and noble qualities, wanting amongst those in authority, were often exercised by men who were without the pale of "worshipful society." The knightly chieftain, whose crested helm and blazoned bearings had proclaimed his renown, even on the burning sands of Asia, and whose gallant form and feats in the listed field, made him the cynosure of bright eyes, was yet, when on his own domain and barony, oftentimes little better than a common robber,—an oppressor of the poor serf who dwelt beneath his castle walls, an extortioner, a cruel task-master, and even a remorseless murderer. The bold outlaw, again, in some few instances, and who, by tyranny and oppression, had been forced to the very acts of retaliation which placed his life a forfeit to the laws, not unfre-

quently became, in his character of a wild and lawless freebooter, a scourge to those from whom he had suffered wrong,—a friend to the oppressed, and, after his own wild fashion, a dispenser of justice and benefit amongst the poor.

Guichard of Poicteau, as the robber-chief was called, was as well known in France and Normandy at this period as Robin Hood in England. He was, in fact, a Saxon of good descent, whose ancestors had dwelt on the shores of Kent. The deep injuries his family had experienced at the hands of the Normans for many years, ending in the abduction of his young and beautiful wife by order of King John, whilst on a hunting excursion in his neighbourhood, had made him an outlaw and an exile from his native land. Possessed of valour, conduct, and prodigal generosity, he quickly succeeded to the command of the banditti he had joined when he fled from Britain to Poicteau.

Having suffered persecution he had learned mercy, and, as far as it was possible, managed

to restrain and curb the before-unbridled license of the robbers he came to command. He professed to make war upon the spoiler, to give the oppressor no quarter, and to befriend the helpless and needy.

At the present time, hanging upon the skirts of Elinor, who had thrown herself into Mirabeau, he had done all in his power to plunder and annoy that "Firebrand of war," as she was called; his band acting in concert with Arthur's little force. On the approach of John, and during the action and capture of the Prince, he had dived into the stronghold we have seen, where he lived like some King of the Mines, in a fairy tale, revisiting the glimpses of the moon, with his minions in all sorts of disguises.

As the faithful Chalamor watched beside the couch of his wounded charge on that night in the cavern, he beheld much that interested him. Amongst others who were captives, he saw the ruffian by whom he had been assailed in the open field, together with the hag, his companion. They were brought in blindfolded

and immediately taken before the captain of the band.

“How now, my masters,” said the chief, as his eye glanced upon the camp-followers. “Wherefore oppress our nest with offal such as this?”

“We took them, noble Guichard,” said the robber, “because their pouches were lined with plunder, and the wallets they carry filled with spoil; and we have brought them before thee, because their hands are red with murder.”

“Saw you them commit the act?” inquired Guichard.

“We did,” returned the robber.

“And upon the wounded and defenceless?” inquired Guichard; “for that is their vocation.”

“We did,” again replied the robber.

“Then shall they surely die,” exclaimed Guichard. “Convey them hence to our prison in the rock, and display here the booty their vile hands have gathered for our advantage. To-morrow I will judge them.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE ASSEMBLY.

A hall, a hall!

SHAKESPERE.

Mad world, mad kings, mad composition.

IBID.

WE have not for some time had occasion in this veritable history to make mention of the fair Bertha Daundelyonne. The swift passage of events have necessarily left us, as well as herself, small time to pause.

The royal leader of the English host, whilst hastening onwards, after landing in France, found so much to occupy his thoughts, that he had for the moment totally forgotten the impression the beauty of the Kentish maiden had made upon him whilst in England, and during their short voyage.

With his accustomed and unbounded indulgence of unhallowed passion, John had divorced his queen, Alice of Gloucester, just before the events narrated in our story, and wedded one of the most celebrated beauties of the age, Isabella of Angoulême, previously engaged to the unfortunate Count de la Marche. Isabella, of whom the monarch was as much enamoured as his disposition permitted him to be of any woman, had joined the royal army from England a few days before; and the King had been too much engaged in attending to the Queen during their hurried march to bestow much thought upon any other woman.

These circumstances had saved the somewhat flighty beauty after their arrival in France from the King's attentions; but on beholding her again in all her charms at the hasty banquet at Mirabeau, his queen being indisposed, and having halted a few days' march in rear, he was again struck with the exceeding beauty of the fair Bertha, and sought, as we have seen, to renew the acquaintance.

The unwearied Elinor, however, had thrown some slight difficulty in his way, for she had commanded the attendance of the fair Bertha upon herself, two of her ladies having died in consequence of their fatigue and alarm during the recent conflict in the citadel.

At the present moment, and in accordance with the fiendlike nature of his disposition, which could revel in the enjoyment of brilliant scenes whilst he was inflicting death and deep misery upon his conquered foes, John, during the short halt he made at Mirabeau, amused himself by giving feasts and balls to the victors by night, and disposing of the numerous prisoners who had fallen into his hands by day; not one knight of the Duke of Brittany's little army escaping death or a prison.

The unhappy Count de la Marche, whose indignation and jealousy had led him to take up arms against the King, together with the Viscounts of Limoges, Thouars, and Lusignan, after their capture were treated with the utmost ignominy. Laden with heavy chains, they were tied in open tumbrils, drawn by

bullocks, and being thus despatched into Normandy, were thrown into separate dungeons. Two hundred knights who had done their devoir bravely in the field, were also in like manner conveyed to different prisons in Normandy and England, where—in a word, to pursue their sad history to the end—they were never more restored to liberty, twenty-two noblemen being actually, by especial order, starved to death in Corfe Castle.

With the remorseless cruelty of some eastern despot, John gloated over the misery of his victims, even during those softer hours in which sweet music, brilliant halls, and the glance of beauty might at least to have melted the sternness of his iron heart.

Let our readers picture to themselves a royal assembly, during the circumstance and hurry of glorious war, held as it was in the vast chambers of the citadel of Mirabeau, within whose walls were to be seen silken dalliance, brilliant beauty, revelry, and minstrelsy; whilst the strict watch, the barred helm, the iron guard, the prison, and the

monster death reigned without. What a scene presents itself to our eye as we gaze within that vast thick-ribbed apartment, hung round as it is with arras, decorated with arms and banners, and illumined with lamps which give forth a gaudy light; whilst serving-men bear fruits, refreshments, and rich wines to the guests during the interval of the dance.

Beautiful women are there apparelled in the heraldic devices of the brave, their symmetry and elegance untrammelled by the capricious requirements of modern fashion; the high-born and chivalrous warriors whispering his flattering tale in lovely ears, and stern royalty even unbending in the fascination of the soft hour.

Seated at the upper end of the vast apartment, and a little apart from Elinor, who is in earnest conversation with Blanche of Castile, the unscrupulous John, the greatest fop of his day, in gorgeous attire, holds converse with Bertha Daundelyonne. The King's eager looks, as he plies the proud beauty with flattery, proclaim that he means to succeed in his suit.

The lady, we perceive, is all blushes and indignation. By and bye, however, her suitor appears to implore forgiveness for some heedless word he may have used, for he is really for the moment deeply captivated with the lady's imperious charms; and yet, perhaps, his heart was never colder than at the moment his voice appears to falter, and his false eyes to glisten. What can be more flattering to the haughty Bertha than the low passionate tone in which she is addressed by the dangerous monarch? What more persuasive than his earnest and deferential humility? The beauty almost forgets the language of refusal or rebuke.

When kings condescend to single out an object of notice, it is generally considered fitting to allow them full scope,—no prying eyes presuming to interfere with the royal pleasure. Accordingly, whilst John gave himself up exclusively to Bertha Daundelyonne, the majority of his immediate attendants received their cue and retired, gladly taking the opportunity of mixing amongst the throng. Two pair of eyes,

however, were fastened upon the King and Bertha, from the midst of the brilliant assemblage, which marked their every movement and gesture—the Brabançon Knight, whom we have before seen at the royal feast, and a youthful minstrel of extreme beauty, seemed both deeply interested in watching the fair damsel and her royal admirer.

The Brabançon, indeed, as much as he dared, appeared bent upon catching any word which might fall from the royal lips. He carried his system of espial so far at last, that John, as the Knight passed the spot where he was sitting, slowly arose from his seat and bent so ruinous a frown upon him, that he drew off abashed, and mingling with the crowd, although he still kept watch, suffered himself no more to encounter the monarch's glance.

The youthful minstrel, standing at a more respectful distance, as his foot kept time to the music, appeared totally lost in admiration of the fair form of Bertha, who was not altogether insensible of the admiration she created,

since her eye, even whilst she seemed intoxicated with the royal attention, occasionally returned his glance.

The King at length observing this, turned an impatient look towards the spot where the youth stood ; and after scrutinizing the crowded assemblage, at length espied him.

“Ha!” he said, as he smiled and again sought the lady’s eye, “we had almost forgotten yonder springald. But, in truth, I am not altogether sorry to behold him in the presence to-night. Report speaks him possessed of wondrous skill with his instrument.”

“Of whom is your Highness speaking?” inquired Bertha, her cheeks suffused with blushes, as she marked the direction of the King’s glance.

“Of yonder follower of thine,” replied John ; “of yonder minstrel, or whatever else it is your fair pleasure to call him. I saw him in a situation of some peril in the field, and am not sorry to perceive that he hath escaped the death which seemed almost inevitable.”

The lady Bertha gave an involuntary shudder, and turned pale as she once more glanced towards the spot where the minstrel was standing.

"I would it were my happiness to create as great an interest in that fair breast," continued the monarch, "as yonder stripling seems to do."

"I know not, my liege," returned Bertha, haughtily, "to whom your Highness alludes."

"To yonder handsome youth," replied John. "Nay, by St. Paul!" he continued, as he beckoned to an attendant, "we must hear a touch of the minion's skill. He shall favour us with one of his lays."

But the page or minstrel was no longer to be seen. He had suddenly left the assemblage, or so effectually concealed himself by mingling amongst the throng, that the messenger the King had despatched in his search failed in his errand; and the monarch, with the usual flightiness of his disposition, soon forgot that he had summoned him.

Meanwhile, during the festivity of the hour, matters were being arranged and transacted

which sufficiently marked the spirit of the time and the disposition of the King. Armed posts ever and anon had audience, and delivered their sealed briefs, whilst the ball was proceeding; and orders were issued by the petulant monarch regarding the fate of several prisoners who had been captured, almost at the same time that he whispered his adulation into the ear of beauty.

With the young and gay all was bright, exciting, and joyous. In the blaze of light and amidst the sounds of minstrelsy, the eye of beauty softened, and the heart of the brave were subdued. But amongst the more aged of the nobles present, there was something like care amidst the pomp and circumstance of the scene; and notwithstanding the presence of majesty, it was easy to observe that many of the warriors present felt anxious to discuss those matters of import upon which their meeting at the assemblage gave them an opportunity of conversing upon, rather than to join in the amusements of the hour. Men here and there were to be remarked joining in small

knots, and earnestly discussing together the unscrupulous and degrading manner in which knights and gentlemen, although enemies and vanquished in fair fight, had been treated. The circumstance of the Count de la Marche and the Viscounts of Limoges, Thouars, and Lusignan, together with three hundred knights, having been ignominiously laden with irons, and placed bound in open carts to be escorted to their several dungeons to Normandy and England, had given great disgust to such men as Salisbury, Warwick, Pembroke, and others. Those grim and stalwart English nobles drew up their huge forms, folded their arms, and elevated their eyebrows, as they met together, and gave utterance to their feelings, shrugging the shoulder and whispering to one another in the ear, as they parted after brief communion.

Amongst those who mingled in the dance and appeared the gayest of the gay during the latter part of the evening was Sir Raoul de Brabant, the Brabançon knight whom we have before mentioned; and as soon as the

King had ended his conversation with the fair Bertha, and he could gain an opportunity of speech with her, he solicited her hand for the dance.

The Brabançon was a witty and insinuating knave, and his conversation highly amused the fair maid of Kent, and he sought to win her favour by every means in his power. So many nobles of higher degree, however, were anxious for a stray smile from the lady, that after the dance, he was fain to draw off, and, as before, admire her at a distance while she mingled amidst the throng.

He stood aloof, therefore, with his finger on his lip, revolving in his mind a hundred different schemes which her beauty had set afloat in his brain. He had seen enough in the early part of the evening to satisfy him as to the royal intentions in that quarter. To his friend and ally, the ambitious Mauluc, he had solemnly pledged his word that he would aid his design of obtaining the hand of the heiress; but as admiration had suddenly ripened into love for the fair object, he him-

self resolved, if possible, after executing the commission entrusted to him by the English king, to win the beauty, either by fair means or foul.

As these thoughts crossed his brain, his eye again caught a glimpse of the handsome minstrel, and he approached him. There was something in the air and manner of this youth, which during the evening had excited considerable curiosity amongst the guests. Even amidst that brilliant assemblage of knights and nobles,—those dauntless spirits, “with ladies’ faces, and fierce dragon’s spleens,” as Shakspeare has described them,—there was a noble bearing about the handsome stranger, which seemed to mark him as above the station he had assumed.

At this period, the joyous science was oft-times adopted for the nonce by the high-born. The troubadours were considered as sacred guests, and were oft-times the cherished friends of the sovereigns of the various countries they visited. The chroniclers of high deeds, they spread the fame of the brave knight from bower

to castle, from camp to court; and through them beauty became renowned, and the acts of the noblest in the world's esteem were wafted across the broad wave.

The minstrel was a stranger to almost every guest in the hall, but knights and nobles smiled upon him as he passed, and bright eyes turned to gaze upon his erect carriage, stately step, and noble features. Amongst others, the stern Elinor, as she sat at one end of the hall, surrounded by some of the higher nobles, condescended to interest herself about the gay youth, and even sent a page to inquire his name.

The minstrel, who had been keenly observing the haughty dame, declined satisfying her curiosity. He claimed the privilege, not uncommon in that age amongst the professors of the joyous science, of passing from hall to hall unknown. He was under a vow of secrecy, he said, and the haughty Elinor was fain, therefore, to put up with this answer, as she declined the discourtesy of compelling him to proclaim himself. All she could gather from

those around her upon the subject was, that the youngster had ridden in the train of a Kentish knight, then present, Sir Walter de Wingham. Still, however, though the minstrel declined the courtesy of the iron-hearted queen, he remained for a considerable space in her immediate vicinity, gazing upon her with no slight curiosity, and revolving in his mind the extraordinary and eventful history of her checquered life.

As he remarked her still beautiful features and regal form, her romantic, unscrupulous, and wicked career seemed a fit subject for the poet's verse. He remembered how, in the prime of youthful beauty, she had become the bride of a French monarch, a man whose narrow ideas, puerility, and bigotry, rendered him hateful to one of her ambitious soul. How she had led this spouse, with a host of soldiers, priests, nuns, and even wives and children, over the burning sands of Palestine. He called to mind her infamous but romantic acquaintance with the infidel Sultan Saladin, whom she first saw, and of whom she became

enamoured, at a tournament in Asia. He remembered her subsequent divorcement from her French husband, and her espousal with the proud Plantaganet of England, the husband of her choice, the father of Richard Cœur-de-lion, and how she had afterwards instilled the seeds of treason and disobedience against his own sire and sovereign, into the mind of her lion-hearted son. He recollected that this was the Elinor whose cruel hand had proffered the poisoned chalice to Rosamond de Clifford in the labyrinth at Woodstock; and whom her vindictive hatred not only urged her to poison, but even to remain and revile her victim, as she watched her death. He knew how she had become the ally of her sometime French husband against her English spouse, and the soul of intrigue and disorder in her own kingdom. He remembered the fifteen years' captivity she had endured, which had failed in softening that iron heart, and her pilgrimage into Germany, at seventy years of age, to endeavour to redeem her lion-hearted

son from his dungeon; and as he continued to gaze upon that stern and relentless brow, he almost admired the undaunted mettle, which now, at eighty years of age, had led her forth the stirrer-up of battle in her native land.

The Queen, however, notwithstanding her sternness of disposition, loved to be surrounded by a brilliant court of ladies. Even amidst the turmoil of war, she considered the affairs of love and courtship as no trivial portion of the business of life. She had instituted and presided over a court composed entirely of women, where all complaints against faithless or discourteous cavaliers, and questions relative to sentimental metaphysics, were discussed with the utmost gravity; the decrees of her tribunal, unreasonable as they sometimes were, being published with solemnity, and executed with the utmost rigour.

As the Brabançon approached the minstrel, whilst gazing upon the assemblage of fair dames surrounding the mother-Queen, he remarked the fixed and admiring look which the

youth bent upon Bertha Daundelyonne, who was now seated amid the Court of Love.

“A surpassing form and heavenly countenance, Sir Minstrel,” observed the Brabançon, “and worthy of your verse. I would give something handsome in the way of largess to one who would furnish me with a sonnet to her smile.”

The Minstrel regarded the Brabançon with a look of the utmost hauteur and disdain.

“And who told thee I ever made or sold verses?” he inquired.

“Marry, your garb would proclaim that you make verse,” returned the Brabançon; and for the selling them, I can only say I would fain buy, could I get a few couplets to present to yonder lady.”

“I am no hireling,” said the minstrel, “which is more than many here can say. If I could make a sonnet descriptive of yonder fair excellence, no price which the world could offer would buy it of me.”

“She is, indeed, a pattern of Nature’s handicraft,” replied the Brabançon. “’Tis

pity one so exquisite is of light estimation amongst men."

The minstrel started. "Ha!" he said, "can this be true? Can the form of an angel harbour aught but purity? But no—I'll not believe it," he continued, turning a severe eye upon the Brabançon; "'tis the wicked invention of a scoundrel knave."

The Brabançon was a soldier of fortune—a mercenary of the day, owning a ruinous fortress, and no land beside; like his friend Mauluc, a desperate fellow, whose sword, in turn, had been of service both to the French and English king. He possessed no touch of proper feeling or honour; but he was easy of offence, and never forgot an affront. He started as the handsome minstrel uttered the opprobrious words, and as the youth turned his back upon him and was moving off, his hand closed upon the hilt of his poniard like a vice. One moment's reflection, however, luckily for the minstrel, came between him and his vengeance, or the youth would have rolled a corpse at his feet. Not where Royalty held its court did he

dare to strike; but he drew a long breath as he recovered his calmness, and ere he followed, gazed around him.

It was, in truth, a brilliant scene—

“ There to the harp did minstrel sing ;
There ladies touch'd a softer string ;
With long-eared cap and motley vest,
The licensed fool retailed his jest.
His magic tricks the juggler plied,
At dice and draughts the gallants vied ;
While some in close recess apart,
Courtied the ladies of their heart,
Nor courted them in vain.”

It was in vain, however, that the Brabançon knight sought to reason himself into the propriety of restraining his anger till a fitting opportunity presented itself of gratifying his resentment at the insult he had received,—an affront he need not have taken to himself, but that he felt the epithets used exactly suited his particular case. He accordingly wound his way amongst the guests till he again found the youth, when with sullen demeanour he dogged him up and down the room like a murderer.

The minstrel, as our readers will have doubtless already perceived, bore so great a

resemblance to the youthful page of the Lady Bertha Daundelyonne, that it was almost impossible to distinguish which was which; and as it happened that neither of them had ever met together in the same place, a number of mistakes had occurred. The youth, to all appearance, was not more than seventeen years of age, possessing a form and face of exceeding beauty; though those who looked closely into his countenance, might have seen that his disposition, although sweet as summer when unopposed, could be violent as an undammed torrent if thwarted or angered.

As the burly Brabançon, with folded arms and flashing eye, stalked after him, the youth became suddenly aware of the annoyance; and turning, bent so stern an eye upon the knight, that he fixed him like a basilisk.

“Have you any trade with me,” he asked, firmly, “that you thus tread upon my skirts?”

“Ere I answer that question,” returned the Knight, “I would fain know to whom I speak.”

“What is my name to such as thee?” returned the youth. “I see the dragon embroid-

ered upon thy coat, and therefore take thee for the hireling whom men call Raoul of Brabant; but I neither know, nor wish to know thee."

"Raoul of Brabant, nevertheless, must know more of thee," returned the Brabançon, "and that ere yonder moon we see through the casement pales in the morning light. Thou hast offered me a deep insult, boy; and if thy lineage proclaims thee worthy of my chastising arm, thou must feel its weight. I demand thy name ere we part."

"When I have achieved one thou shalt have it," replied the youth. "Meanwhile, we talk here in the haunt of men. Wilt meet me five minutes hence in the pleasaunce beneath the north tower?"

The Brabançon was struck with the ready and quick spirit of the youth. He even felt cowed beneath his fierce eye; not that the Knight wanted courage—few men did so in that iron age—but he was a cautious person, and somewhat jealous of involving himself openly in a duel with a youth so distinguished in appearance, and whose name he knew not.

To have him dealt with by proxy, or even to smite him from behind a buttress, would be more to his taste. He therefore paused, and pursued considerable caution in following the hot-headed lad from the apartment.

From what he had that night seen, however, the Knight felt that, in this youth, he had a dangerous rival with the Lady Bertha Daundelyonne, and he resolved, in accordance with the unscrupulous practices of men of his profession, one way or another to put the lad to silence.

Taking his way to the lower apartment of the castle, he passed under the arch of a small tower which led to the pleasaunce, and mingled amongst the crowd of menials, servitors, and men-at-arms, who filled the lower offices of the building during the riotous license consequent upon the castle's occupation by the King.

As he passed amongst the crowd, he encountered and recognised the attendant, De Bossu. This ruffianly companion, who, with several of his fellows had been drinking potations pottle-deep at the buttery, was an old acquaintance

of the Brabançon, having indeed formerly ridden in his troop, where he was known, even amongst the dissolute fellows who, at that time, served under command of the redoubted Raoul as "Bossu le Mauvaise."

As the ruffian was under some obligation to his former leader for the vile character which had recommended him to the service of King John, the Knight suddenly thought he might make use of him in the present instance. He accordingly favoured him so far as to stop and renew the acquaintance. The Bravo was at this moment, in his own opinion, fit company for an emperor, seeing that he was three-parts drunk.

"Ha," he said, "most noble captain, may I never sip hippocras again but I am right glad to recognize you."

"The very man I most desired to meet," returned the Knight. "I pr'ythee step apart with me here; I have a commission for thee which shall fill thy pouch to-night."

"Gramercy," said the ruffian, "'twill not be the first time my arm has won a purse from

thee. But who is to be dealt withal? Mind thee, Sir Raoul, I am in royal pay at present, and cannot undertake anything beneath what a gentleman of condition ought to engage in."

"Hark'ee," said the Brabançon, when they had emerged from the dark postern of the tower, "I am invited forth here to-night by an unknown youth:—to be plain, at the present moment I neither want the hazard nor the éclat of such a matter. At the same time, my interests require that my opponent should be out of the way. Do thou, when we engage, come upon him behind, throw thy cloak over his head, and with thy giant strength hurl him from the parapet into the moat."

"Enough," cried the Bravo; "go to, I understand thee, and will to thy assistance at the first clash of weapons."

The Brabançon on this understanding immediately passed into the pleasaunce, and a few minutes' walk brought him to the spot where the Minstrel was in waiting.

"You see I have accepted your invitation,"

observed the Knight, "although I neither know your name nor lineage."

"It is well," returned the youth; "the disgrace of the encounter, if any there be, will be endured by me, since he who vilifies the fair fame of a lady deserves merely the hangman's cord. Thou hast cast aspersions upon one whom I profess to worship, and I will in this instance myself chastise thee."

"Gramercy," said the Brabançon, again taken aback at the youth's impetuosity, "this springald will bear us all out of the field anon."

The rays of the moonshine, which reduced all around to patches of pure silver-white, or dark and distinct shadow, the unbroken outlines of which were hard as iron, rendering the trees and shrubs of the pleasaunce in a hundred fantastic shapes, gave the combatants plenty of light for the encounter.

The Brabançon knight was in no hurry to commence; he looked anxiously into the dark shadow of the buttress of the tower beside which they stood, for the ally he expected.

But the youth gave him small time for consideration, and dropping his cloak attacked him vigorously the moment he had drawn his sword.

The Brabançon was a good swordsman, but he quickly found himself no match for his more mercurial antagonist, and notwithstanding his superior strength, he was twice wounded in as many minutes; so that, growing enraged, he endeavoured to rush upon his foe and cut him down with furious blows.

At this moment the Bravo stole up, and approaching the youthful minstrel from behind, was about to seize him at advantage in his powerful gripe, when he immediately recognized him, and paused for a moment. He then suddenly drew his blade, and thrusting himself between the combatants endeavoured to separate them by striking up their weapons.

“How now, my masters?” he said; “know ye not the danger of settling private quarrels so near the royal apartments?”

“Come not between us now, good Bossu,”

said the enraged Knight; "stand back, till I have chastised the insults of this malapert with my own arm."

"It may not be," replied the Bravo; "I have good reasons for not permitting the boy to be hurt."

"Hence, hound!" exclaimed the page, "and take thy interference where it's needed, amongst thine own drunken fellows in the buttery. Stand from between us, or, by heaven! I will pierce thee with my rapier's point."

The ruffian laughed aloud, as he again sought to pacify the combatants, a matter however he found it impossible to effect without drawing both their weapons upon himself. At length the altercation became so violent that a party of the castle guard, making their rounds, suddenly pounced upon them; the Bravo effecting his escape as both the combatants were captured and carried off to the court of guard.

Queen Elinor was extremely particular in all the etiquette of a court, and although she never permitted herself to be approached by

her knights and nobles unweaponed, she visited all private brawls, and even the drawing of a sword within the precincts of her quarters, with the utmost severity. A report was accordingly made to her of the encounter which had just taken place almost beneath the windows of her chamber, and the combatants were immediately ordered to be confined in separate dungeons for the night. Meanwhile, the Bravo, who in virtue of the offices he was in the habit of performing for the King, could at most times gain an audience, as soon as the monarch withdrew from the assemblage, sought an interview in order to apprise him of the circumstances. Indeed it was one of John's peculiarities to have everything that happened in the vicinity of his residence vigilantly spied into. Like the Scottish Thane, there was scarce a noble in his realm—

“ But in his house,
He kept a servant fee'd.”

When, therefore, the monarch was informed, whilst he doffed his ball costume and assumed an easy robe, that this respectable functionary

craved a few minutes' audience ere he retired to rest, he ordered the Bravo instantly to be admitted, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, and the "shag-ear'd villain" the next minute stood in the presence.

"How now, sirrah?" said the King, "is there treason afloat to-night, that you think fit to approach us with so hideous a countenance at this late hour?"

De Bossu, who, according to his usual custom when admitted to an audience, stood with downcast eyes until his master addressed him, upon this raised his eyebrows and showed his teeth, executed a most ghastly grin as he replied,

"Your Highness gave me charge respecting a certain page," he said.

"Ha!" said John, "we now remember as much, though the hurry of events had driven the circumstance, together with other matters appertaining, from our memory; but what of that, good Bossu? I saw the blooming Gany-mede but lately in the hall to-night. Thou

hast kept a sure eye, I find, upon your charge."

"Gramercy," returned the Bravo. "It would puzzle half a dozen servitors to keep that youth, or whatever else it is your Highness's pleasure to consider him, in view for any length of time. Saving your royal pleasure, the keeping of that page's throat from being slit hath given me more trouble than would the cutting of half a score of weasands."

"How so?" said the King, "the stripling seems gentle as a young fawn."

"Your Highness will, notwithstanding, understand that the creature is a perfect mystery. One moment all timidity, modesty, and retiring diffidence, and the next all impatience and hot valour. I saw him in the train of Sir Walter de Wingham during the battle of Mirabeau, performing deeds that would have graced the best lance in your Highness's army."

"You surely dream," said John. "The

page I gave you instructions to keep an eye upon was, I understand, for the most part of that day in rear with the women and baggage; the only time he was in the *mêlée* was whilst delivering a message from ourself, what time Lord Folkstone brought him into the field."

"Well, my liege," returned the Ruffian, "be it as it may—under favour, I speak—this piece of incomprehensible waggery, it is my duty to inform your Highness is just now laid by the heels."

"Ha!" exclaimed the King, "how mean ye by that, sirrah?"

"Marry," replied the Bravo, "your Highness must know that, being full of valour as a young weasel, the lad fastened a quarrel upon Sir Raoul of Brabant, and the two have been taken in the act of brawling in the precincts, by the Queen's guard, and clapped into a dungeon by her especial orders."

"This must be immediately looked to," said John, "our mother's somewhat antiquated court of love must not be suffered to interfere with

our own affaires de cœur. The matter must be righted at once, good Bossu. Sir Raoul of Brabant is especially employed in our service, and we would not at present that even the other culprit should come under our mother's wrathful judgment for this offence. Look ye," resumed the King, after a short pause, "bear this, our signet-ring, to the officer of the Queen's guard. Bid him release the prisoners you have mentioned, and we will ourself bear him harmless. That done, give Raoul de Brabant a hint to depart without delay upon the mission already entrusted to him; and do you yourself see the page lodged in the wing of the castle appropriated to the attendants of the Queen-mother. You understand?"

"In the quarter appropriated to her Highness's ladies?" said De Bossu, inquiringly.

"You heard our order, sirrah," said the Monarch, "begone!"

The Bravo withdrew to execute his mission, and the King prepared to address himself, after completing his change of costume, to an adventure he had that night resolved upon

whilst present at the ball, which was no other than a visit to the apartment of Bertha Daundelyonne.

“This haughty Saxon beauty,” he said, “contemns our suit; she has escaped me once, but to-night I will woo her like a soldier.”

Whilst he spoke the Monarch took the lamp from the table, and leaving his apartment, sought the wing of the castle in which the lodgings of Queen Elinor’s attendants were situate.

CHAPTER V.

THE CAPTIVE AT FALAISE.

It is the curse of Kings, to be attended
By slaves, that take their humours for a warrant
To break within the bloody house of life.
And, on the winking of authority,
To understand a law.

SHAKESPERE.

IN a small chamber of the strong castle of Falaise sat a lad of some sixteen years of age. In his countenance were to be seen traces of the deepest dejection; whilst, so variable are the feelings of youth, in the hollow eye and ghastly countenance, a wild and almost insane expression might have been observed, as some faint ray of hope illumined his features. It was Arthur of Bretagne, who had now been for some weeks a close prisoner at Falaise. But in that short time, how changed was the beau-

tiful youth from what he had appeared when he was first captured at Mirabeau.

The apartment in which he was at present confined was a small chamber in the eastern tower of the castle. The walls were of immense thickness, rendering the inmate as secure from all escape or rescue, as the living reptile we sometimes find entombed in the heart of the quarry. Whilst the inner flanking wall, which on this side the keep rose full twenty feet in height, and was reared scarce ten paces distant, excluded the slightest glimmer of sunshine, through the narrow embrasure constituting the sole window of the apartment. Dim and gloomy was the aspect of the interior, cold and deathlike was the feeling it conveyed to the inmate. No companionable fire cheered the lonely hour ; one worm-eaten heavy oaken table, and the chair he occupied, together with a low truckle-bed, forming the accommodation of a prince. Alone, in gloom and despair, with no possible amusement to beguile the heavy time ;—ill, without an eye to mark his grief, or a single human being to care if death

ensued ; dreading the coming night, which increased the horrors of his captivity, the unhappy Arthur felt already a foretaste of the grave. He suffered even before death the horrors of a living tomb. Murder ! withered murder ! was in his fearful thoughts.

To the student, the excursionist, and the antiquarian, how delightful to ponder over the ruined chamber, the falling tower, the flanking wall, and the mouldering keep. How sweetly the balmy air recommends itself as we stand upon the moss-clad fragments, and gaze around at the venerable ruin and its surrounding scenery,—the castle lake, the forest glade, the wild chase, and the noble park. And yet how few, whilst in the enjoyment of health and freedom, in such vicinity, pause to consider the hopeless and miserable waste of years some captive has sighed out in darkness and despair, ere time burst the cerements which enclosed him, and made beautiful to succeeding eyes what, to him, conveyed but horror ; and whose only escape from which was through the jaws of death.

Sharp misery had already worn the form of the noble and high-spirited Arthur, and in his countenance were to be seen traces of cruel disease consequent upon the sufferings he had endured. An unnatural lustre burned in the eye, which glistened in the murky vault in which he was confined. His haughty bearing and noble carriage were almost gone. His high spirit was evidently failing him. The terrors of torture were upon his mind during the day, and disturbed his sleep by night. In a few short weeks every slight particle of hope had been gradually removed. Successive orders from his unnatural uncle had increased the strictness of his captivity, had changed his jailors and withdrawn the few indulgences the humanity of Hubert de Burgh had in the first instance insisted upon giving him. Nay, even now a lower depth awaited his misery, and, although entombed in the strongest and gloomiest apartment of the strong keep of Falaise, a deeper dungeon, a more dreadful prison-house, was in prospect ere he was consigned to the grave.

There was at this moment one other inmate of the castle of Falaise, who, although in the possession of liberty, health, and power, felt almost as wretched as the miserable tenant of the prison above which he dwelt, and this was the soldier to whom the safe custody of the unhappy Prince had been consigned, Hubert de Burgh.

To this highly favoured statesman, wise in council and brave in the field, were sometimes entrusted commissions which almost shook his allegiance.

On first bringing the young Prince to Falaise, Hubert, although his orders had been strict and severe in regard to the custody of so important a charge, had ventured to grant the youth every indulgence in his power consistent with his safe keeping. He had himself seen, as far as he dared, to the comfort of the unhappy Arthur; lodging him in an apartment of the fortress somewhat suitable to his exalted rank, whence, although from its giddy height and strongly-barred doors and windows there was no chance of escape, still

from which the captive could at least see the beauty of a world from the enjoyment of which he was for ever excluded.

This indulgence had, however, been suddenly noticed and consequently forbidden. Spies had reported to the vindictive John that the jailor and his captive were growing attached to each other; insinuating that the noble and winning boy might possibly so far gain upon his keeper's heart as to shake his allegiance and win him to his side. In truth, the dark-minded Mauluc had been exercising his function, and had made such a report of proceedings as consorted with his own evil disposition. The King, therefore, who was satisfied he could not find a custodian for the young Plantagenet of more assured faith than the trusty Hubert, had insisted upon the prisoner being kept in closer captivity, and had at the same time expressed his disapprobation of the intimate terms on which the captive and his jailor lived.

Still, although Hubert was fain to obey his royal master, he found it difficult to sequester

himself from the unhappy Prince, and he still tended him with care and attention in the narrow prison-house to which he had been consigned.

The grief this companionship caused the humane jailor, and his apprehension of the probable fate of one so young and interesting, had affected his health, whilst the noble-hearted boy, in the most affectionate manner, and with the tenderest solicitude, sought to sooth his grief as he marked his failing spirit and aching brow,

“Saying, What lack you? or where lies your grief;
Or, What good love may I perform for you?”

The dreadful anticipations of the unhappy Hubert were indeed but too soon realized. An order one day arrived from the King to transfer the prisoner into other keeping; the knight who bore this order signifying to Hubert that, although he himself was to refrain from all intercourse with the Prince, he was yet to remain in command of the castle, allowing neither ingress nor egress for twenty-four hours from its receipt.

The knight, who was indeed no other than our old acquaintance Raoul de Brabant, was accompanied by two evil-looking companions; men, who appeared uneasy in the light of day, cased as they were in harness and their countenances half-sheltered within the hollow of their casques.

This was a severe test to the truth and loyalty of Hubert. At one moment he almost resolved to tamper with the King's messenger, and, at the almost certain chance of recapture and death to both, endeavour to escape with the young Prince. A moment's reflection, however, dissuaded him from this course, and he saw it would be now too late.

"Why is this?" he demanded wildly of the Brabançon, as he stood with the King's mandate in his hand. "Wherefore this alteration? The Prince is safe, and secure in my charge."

"Nay, Sir Hubert," replied the Brabançon, "it is not for you or me to ask the why or the wherefore of our orders. I bring you my commission from the King; it is for you to obey it,

or not, as you list. Have I, or have I not, together with Sir Walter Mauluc, sole charge of the Prince for the time specified in yonder order?"

"On your knightly vow," said Hubert solemnly, "and as you hope for salvation, you mean not to practise on the life of the boy?"

The swarthy brow of the Brabançon darkened. "I am not used to be so questioned, Sir Hubert de Burgh," he replied, "nor do I acknowledge your right to catechize me."

"Then by the eternal Being," said Hubert, growing angry in his deep grief, "I promise you one thing, Sir Raoul of Brabant, ere I relinquish my prisoner to your care. It is this: that if at the expiration of your guardianship the Prince be not re-delivered into my hands alive, I will cleave your skull with my own hand, and hang it from the highest turret of Falaise."

"I allow the condition," returned the Brabançon, "though at some other time I may, perchance, remind you of the terms of the

compact. At present, I beg the favour of the keys of the Prince's chamber."

It was some small relief to Hubert to gain even this assurance; but the character of the new comer, the men he had with him, and the association of Mauluc, but too plainly showed him that some foul and butcher-work was either then to be enacted, or in anticipation. He struck his clenched hand upon his forehead; then hastily seizing the keys at his girdle, which admitted to the wing of the castle where the Prince was confined, he dashed them with all his force against the stone walls of the apartment, and rushed out upon the ramparts to cool his heated brain.

"Methinks, you have passed your word to yonder Chamberlain somewhat rashly," observed Mauluc. "How know you that our charge will survive the trial he is to undergo?"

"I have also passed my word to one mightier than Hubert de Burgh," returned the Brabançon; "let that suffice, good Walter. Methinks, you have become over-scrupulous of late."

"Not a whit," replied Mauluc, "but I know

Hubert de Burgh more intimately than you seem to do ; and take my word for it, good Raoul, the stout Englishman is not one to break his oath."

"Well, be it so," answered the other ; "I mean not to come within the danger of his wrath. I have promised not to practise on the life of the Prince ; neither will I. You know how far my commission extends ; trust me, I will not exceed it. John's last words were, to avoid extremity."

"I marked the order," said Mauluc ; "and well I knew—because I know the man—what such a caution really meant."

It was in the after-part of the day when these two worthies and their attendants had arrived at Falaise, and, after conferring for some time on matters apparently of deep and dangerous import, to judge from the low and earnest manner in which their conversation was carried on, that they descended to another and more secluded apartment of the castle. Here they ordered refreshments to be brought, after which they gave audience to the two ill-favoured

attendants they had brought with them, and remained in secret conclave till the shadows of night began to descend, and the bat flitted about the walls and towers. Meanwhile, the troubled Hubert, hour after hour, continued to pace the battlements. It was in vain the soft evening breeze fanned his cheek, and the moon silvering tower and turret shed a flood of light upon the surrounding scene; a dark cloud was upon his soul; a horrid presentiment of something dreadful seemed ever present to his imagination. Unwilling as he was to entertain conjecture of the exact deed his fears obscurely foreshadowed, the picture of a fearful scene likely to be enacted, or perhaps at that moment in progress, was ever before his eyes.

The apartments Hubert tenanted in the fortress were just above the chamber he had first appropriated to his prisoner. The Prince, as we have seen, had been removed by royal order to closer confinement, and now tenanted the small chamber the beginning of this chapter has endeavoured to describe; and

strong as were its walls, a man-at-arms was stationed night and day on the outside, beneath the iron-grated loop-hole which admitted the breath of heaven. As Hubert walked the giddy rampart, he ever and anon paused and started at the slightest sound passing upon the breeze. For some hours, however, nought but the measured tread of the different sentinels, and the clatter of their arms and harness, disturbed his sad thoughts and anticipations. As the night approached, dark and heavy clouds gradually rolled over the sparkling vault, and obscured the moon's light.

One heavy, black, and portentous mass hanging like a huge bird of ill omen, seemed to extend its wings directly over the donjon-keep. It remained stationary for a few minutes, as if to hide the building from the open world; and as Hubert stood with his arms folded watching the gathering gloom, it seemed to growl forth the indignation of the heavens at the unhallowed passions and evil deeds of the inhabitants of the building, bel-
lowing forth a peal of its artillery, which

seemed to shake the edifice to its foundation. The flash which immediately followed was more in accordance with Hubert's present mood than the calmness and beauty of the preceding hour. The grandeur of heaven's wrath seemed in some measure to withdraw his thoughts from the things of earth.

The rain now suddenly poured down in torrents, and ere many minutes had passed, another peal followed, and almost at the same moment, and amidst the loud crash of the thunder, a wailing cry was distinctly heard from beneath. The Chamberlain started at the sound. He listened in breathless anxiety; a piercing shriek succeeded, which was out-tongued by the deep-mouthed thunder. As he continued to listen, the cries were again and again repeated. His heart beat violently, and he sickened as he stood rivetted to the spot. Again he distinctly heard a shriek. He felt his bosom throb, and his chest fill; his hand grasped the hilt of his sword, and rushing down the steps which led to the parapet

beneath, he called to the sentinel posted without the Prince's chamber,—

“What cries were those I heard but now?” he asked wildly.

No answer was returned. He looked over the parapet,—the fire-fraught atmosphere giving light around. There was no one there,—the man had been removed. Another shriek, and a sound of entreaty, caught his ear; and as he recognized the voice, he rushed down the steps which led to the inner bastion of the castle, and hastily re-entered the building. As he passed through the low portal which gave entrance to the interior at this part, he met his esquire, and stopped for a moment to speak to him.

“How is this, Lyonnel,” he said, “the sentinel is removed from before the Prince's chamber? Who has presumed to dismiss him without my orders?”

“Sir Walter Mauluc gave directions that he should be withdrawn,” returned the esquire.

“By what authority?” demanded Hubert quickly.

“He produced an order from the King,” returned the esquire.

De Burgh struck his hands together.

“Haste to the court of guard,” he exclaimed, “and bring six men-at-arms to the chamber without the Prince’s apartment.”

The esquire bowed and withdrew, whilst Hubert hastened to the narrow cell of the prisoner. Seizing a lamp which burned in a niche of the wall along the passage he traversed, he quickly arrived before the chamber next to the one in which the Prince was confined. It was closed and bolted. He struck it sharply with the pommel of his sword, and demanded instant admittance.

A voice from within inquired his name and business.

In a voice of thunder he gave his name, with the addition that, if the door was not opened on the instant, he would have it beaten to pieces by the castle-guard, and hang up the sentinel he found on duty.

The man immediately withdrew the bolts, and admitted him.

Before the door of the chamber he found one of the attendants whom the Brabançon and Mauluc had brought with them. The guard at first appeared inclined to hinder him from proceeding further, but Hubert rushed upon him, and dashing him aside, entered the Prince's cell. The sight he beheld there it is hopeless to attempt adequately to describe. The unhappy Arthur was supported in the arms of the Brabançon—he had fainted. Sir Walter Mauluc, in full armour, his visor closed, stood with folded arms beside him, whilst an executioner, kneeling over a sort of brazier upon the floor, was endeavouring to blow the glowing charcoal in order to heat the instrument with which to sear the wounds of the victim.

At first Hubert started with horror at the sight; the next moment he rushed forward and snatched the Prince from the arms of the Brabançon.

In an instant he had comprehended their diabolical instructions.

“My poor boy,” he said, as he knelt down and endeavoured to recover the Prince from his swoon, “and is it only by mutilations, such as these fiends have attempted, that you can be permitted to live?”

The Brabançon, who had been disarmed by the cries and entreaties of the unhappy Prince, was nothing loth to resign him to the protection of the Chamberlain. Not so Walter Mauluc. His dark eyes flashed through the bars of his helmet, and as Hubert bent over the form of the Prince, he thus addressed him—

“Sir Hubert de Burgh, I understand not this intrusion. It is contrary to the express order of the King, and must be answered.”

“Hell-hound!” fiercely exclaimed Hubert, suddenly starting to his feet, and confronting Mauluc, “wouldst thou further outrage this bleeding innocence? Hence from my sight! Quit the chamber, lest I hurl thee from it headlong. And you, too, Sir Raoul de

Brabant, caitiff and liar as thou art, didst thou not pledge me your word the Prince should receive no injury at your hands? Begone, sirs," he continued, in a calmer tone, as he again turned to the Prince, "begone, and take yonder evil ruffians in your train, or by heaven I will do a deed shall make ye rue this hour!"

"We have warrant for what we do," said the Brabançon, doggedly; "you will not dare dispute the royal order."

"Now, by heaven!" cried the enraged Hubert, "I will resist any—all orders that such vile instruments produce!"

"Has Hubert de Burgh the power or the audacity," asked Mauluc, with a sneer, "to resist the royal warrant?"

"Heed thou not that," returned Hubert; "suffice it, I defy all consequences in this matter. I dismiss ye both from your charge, and I take it upon myself to suspend* your

* According to the Monkish historian, Hubert took upon him to suspend proceedings till the King was further consulted.

infernal cruelties upon this youth, till I have myself further communicated with the King."

The two Knights upon this conferred together in an under-tone for a brief space, whilst Hubert, again kneeling beside the prostrate Prince, sought to recover him from his swoon.

At length Mauluc turned and once more addressed him—

"How if we resist your interference, Sir Hubert," he said, "and enforce obedience to the royal mandate? bethink ye, we are three to one here."

"Urge not too far an angry man," returned Hubert; "I have already dismissed ye hence; and by my soul, unless you instantly quit the chamber, I will crimson its stones with your blood."

"'Tis well," returned Mauluc; "my presence shall not longer trouble you, Sir Knight. I return to Mirabeau on the instant."

So saying, he hastily quitted the apartment, and the hoof-tread of his departing steed was

soon afterwards heard in the court-yard of the castle.

Sir Raoul de Brabant also, whose countenance showed some tokens of remorse for the share he had taken in the vile transaction, stole quietly after his confederate, giving the ill-looking ruffian, who had stood like some attendant demon during the foregoing controversy, a sign to follow.

He drew a long breath so soon as he had passed the men-at-arms, who, by Hubert's order, were waiting in the adjoining chamber, and addressed his companion.

"Find your fellow, good Malios," he said, "and get our horses forthwith into the court-yard. I am sorry I ever entered upon this business; it will lead us all into trouble."

"Do we return to Mirabeau?" inquired the ruffian.

"No," returned the Brabançon; "we must put on towards Brittany without delay. I have matters to transact there also, and I foresee this part of the world will be too hot to hold us ere long."

As soon as the assassin had departed, Hubert arose and carefully closed the door of the chamber.

The Prince was still insensible, and, although 'twas a piteous sight to behold the unfortunate youth stretched like a corpse before him, his jailor, upon reflection, resolved not to call for assistance, or apply restoratives towards his recovery. After what had happened, he strongly hoped the Prince would never unclose his eyes again.

This sorrowful reflection suggested an idea to the faithful soldier, which he resolved to act upon, and throwing himself into the vacant chair, he spent some minutes in weighing its practicability. Whilst he was yet deliberating upon this project, the Prince gave signs of life.

As soon as he perceived by a slight convulsive shuddering in the prostrate body, that the Prince was returning to a state of consciousness, Hubert arose and left the apartment, and carefully closing the door behind him, dismissed the guard he had previously ordered

to the ante-room. He then returned to the chamber, and shutting and locking the door, remained for some time immured with his prisoner.

It was two hours after midnight ere Hubert emerged from the chamber. He then again carefully locked the door, and with stealthy pace took his way along the passage and ascended towards his own quarter, by the winding stairs of the flanking tower in that angle of the fortress.

Arrived in his apartment, he again paused to deliberate upon the plan he had resolved on pursuing in order to save the Prince.

“Would that the noble-hearted Faulconbridge were here,” he said; “this fearful scene had then been unacted; or, at least, I could have made a better effort to save the Prince. Nay, if the young Lord of Folkstone had survived, I should have had an adviser and assistant with whom I could have consulted. As it is, I must undergo the danger of the deception by myself. Eustace de Bellville,” he continued, “I might

take into my confidence ; but no, I will not embark one so young upon a scheme of so much danger."

Long and anxiously the Chamberlain sat and pondered. The bell of the castle sounded the third hour ere he could resolve upon the exact course to pursue. He then rose from his seat and drew aside a secret pannel which led to a small closet-like apartment, apparently cut in the thickness of the wall. Into this he conveyed the mattrass and some part of the bedding from his own couch, disposing them so as to make a comfortable bed upon the floor.

He then once more took his lamp and descended to the chamber in which the unhappy Arthur was confined.

Faint and ill as the Prince was, the returning kindness of his only friend—his good Hubert, as he called him—gave him a degree of hope and comfort which for many days he had not felt, and he poured forth thanks and blessings upon his preserver.

The Chamberlain placed his finger on his lip. "Not a word now," he said; "we must be silent as the grave."

The youth shuddered at the word, and shrank back as Hubert stooped and was about to take him in his arms.

"You are not afraid of trusting yourself with me, boy?" he said, somewhat reproachfully.

"Alas, no," replied the Prince, "I were not worthy of your kindness if I doubted your truth, good Hubert; but methinks I am weak and capable of fears at this dead hour."

"You must come quickly and silently, my poor lad," returned Hubert; "believe me, I run a fearful risk in thus endeavouring to serve you."

The opportune interference of Hubert had indeed saved the Prince from losing his eyesight, which dreadful infliction would have quickly followed the horrible mutilations already partially inflicted upon him. As it was, the poor youth was quite unable to walk;

so that when Hubert, after assisting him to rise, endeavoured to support his painful steps, he found the Prince quite unable to ascend the steps of the tower.

Stopping, therefore, after a few paces had been gained, and whilst the groans of the unhappy victim proclaimed his agony, Hubert stopped, and taking his charge in his arms, bore him up the turret-stairs like an infant.

He then deposited him, as comfortably as his situation would permit, upon the couch he had prepared, tending and administering to his wants with the care and attention of a nurse till daybreak, when carefully examining the sliding pannel which concealed the opening, Hubert prepared to leave him to the deep sleep his exhausted condition superinduced.

It was indeed a pleasing sight to behold that iron warrior softened into the watchful and tender nurse; to see the athletic form of the Norman warden bending over the pale face of the invalid; his dark stern features relaxed into an expression of pity as he listened to

the disturbed breathing and murmured horror to which the dreams of the persecuted youth gave rise.

“Unhappy boy,” he said, “thy life had perhaps worn out in happiness and unmolested content, hadst thou been born the meanest serf in thine own dukedom; but now, alas! thy dangerous proximity to the crown of England is thy bitterest enemy. Much as I love thee,” he continued, as he stopped again to look upon him ere he closed the pannel of the wainscotting, “much as I love thee, my poor lad, I pray to God thy present sleep may prove eternal.”

As he gave utterance to the feelings of his heart, the thought struck Hubert that it could hardly be considered a crime were he to be himself the finisher of the deep sorrows of his captive.

“He is but like some poor half-crushed worm in the path of power,” he said, “whom, out of humanity, we stamp into the earth to end its torture. Wherefore not at once then terminate the sorrows of the poor boy, and

dismiss his innocent soul to heaven?" His hand sought his dudgeon-dagger as he spoke, and the evil tempter of mankind was at his elbow to back that thought with the suggestions of wealth and power likely to follow so signal a service to his royal master.

'Twas, however, but the wavering of an instant. Under no circumstances could the noble Hubert have stooped to become the butcher of his innocent charge. He carefully closed the secret pannel, and throwing himself into the chair before the hearth, was again for some time buried in deep thought.

The hours passed unheeded as the Warden of Falaise sat in his thick-walled chamber. Visions of future greatness, mixed up with all the chaotic and fleeting thoughts incident to the exciting and dangerous times in which he lived, followed each other in succession, as he pondered over the recent melancholy spectacle he had witnessed. Whilst the wind piped and groaned in the huge cavernous chimney, and he still sat and gazed upon the

expiring embers on the hearth, his gloomy thoughts turned upon former deeds of butchery, which had perhaps been enacted in that apartment. Thus the night wore on, and except the sentinels upon the walls, the Warden of Falaise was the only watcher there.

CHAPTER VI.

AN ELOPEMENT.

The sun begins to gild the western sky ;
And now, it is about the very hour
That Silvia, at Patrick's cell, should meet me.
She will not fail; for lovers break not hours,
Unless it be to come before their time ;
So much they spur their expedition.

SHAKSPERE.

THE events which had taken place on the night of the royal assembly had been any thing but satisfactory to the fair Bertha. Her pride had been wounded in more ways than one. The King had for the second time, as she conceived, insulted her by his unscrupulous advances; and her favourite, the page, of whom she had latterly seen but little during the hurry of the march from England, had behaved in an incomprehensible manner on that

evening, inasmuch as he had neither spoken to, nor even come near her. To so haughty a beauty, this conduct in one so lowly, and whom she had honoured with especial favour, was hardly to be endured. The devoted affection she had all along felt for this singular youth, the strength of which surprised herself, he had indeed, never appeared to return with any warmth; so that, although they had been much thrown together, no syllable of love had ever crossed their lips. In short, Bertha Daundelyonne felt most unhappy on retiring to her room on this night. The expedition in which she had promised herself so many triumphs and so much pleasure, from the fickleness of a little foolish page, she said to herself, had been quite ruined. And yet the boy had never seemed to stand or gaze with such beaming eyes upon her countenance as he had done on that night.

There was another thing which troubled the spirit of the fair maid of Kent—namely, her separation from the protecting influence of the good Knight, her sire. She had never

before been a hundred leagues from home, and the household of Elinor of Guienne and the Court of John were rather startling to a beginner, however much pride and ambition might pervade her breast. With all her faults, Bertha Daundelyonne possessed a warm and affectionate heart. She dearly loved her father, and her having necessarily been separated from him during the hurry of the expedition, rather annoyed and depressed her. She occupied an apartment in the western wing of the castle. It was approachable from the winding staircase of a small tower, which also in its ascent led to other rooms in the different stories; all of them at present in the occupation of the bright ladies constituting Queen Elinor's court of love.

As the drowsy chimes sounded from the citadel, Bertha threw open her lattice, and gazed out upon the dark and frowning battlements and circling walls of the huge castle, in some parts shawdowed black as ink, and in others whitened by the rays of the clear and shining moon.

As her eye travelled over the frowning ramparts, she suddenly heard, in a lower apartment, a clear melodious voice singing the following simple ditty, which was one of those lighter lays wherewith the troubadours of the time were wont to relieve their more lengthy romances. The words ran thus:—

In learning love delights not,
Yet from the fool he flies;
The wise one he requites not,
But with the dullard dies,
For folly, folly, folly—folly must sigh in vain!

His arts are those of pleasing,
His cares are those of bliss,
His toils are those of teasing,
His kindest boon a kiss.
But folly, folly, folly—folly must sigh in vain!

Then wherefore tread the mazes
Of Love's capricious school?
He scorns the pedant's praises,
Yet cares not for the fool!
Sing folly, folly, folly—folly must sigh in vain!

As the lady listened, the voice, albeit its tones appeared more powerful and manly, seemed familiar to her ear, and she thought she recognized it as that of her favourite page.

As the song finished, she was about to address the singer, when he again commenced—

The eye would fain discover
The star which shone above,
But the heart roams sadly over
The bitter fruits of love;
No light to cheer—no hope to raise,
The soul entangled in its maze.

For ah! in rapture scorning
The frown of changing fame,
His smile my path adorning,
I felt no yielding shame;
But now, my thoughts are all of woe,
His pride is quelled—his crest is low!

After these two simple ditties, the singer commenced a sort of serenade, in which, as the lady listened with breathless anxiety, she plainly distinguished her own name.

The voice ceased, and a thrill of delight ran through the lady's veins as she stood awaiting its recommencement.

Had the tones been any other than those of one whom, spite of herself, she loved, she would doubtless have felt indignant at the freedom. As it was, she stood entranced before the open casement in a happy state

between joy and fear—fear, lest the boldness of her serenader should awaken the stern Elinor, whose apartments were just beneath; and joy at finding herself beloved by her favourite page.

Whilst she tarried, hoping for a renewal of the ditty, she heard a slight noise in the chamber behind her, accompanied by a light foot-step; and turning round, was only just in time to perceive the figure of a man in the apartment, as he extinguished the light upon her table, and advanced towards her. Her first impulse was to scream aloud. In the next moment, however, the courage and pride of a Daundelyonne rose with the occasion, and she demanded of the intruder his business in her apartment at that hour.

The figure made no answer, but rudely seized her in his arms. At the same moment the moon suddenly shining out shewed her the dark curly beard and pale visage of one of whom she had reason to stand in awe.

The fears which even the presence of a mysterious midnight visitant failed of arousing

in her breast, were instantly called forth at the thought that she recognized in the intruder the unscrupulous John, and she instantly screamed aloud for assistance, endeavouring to release herself from his embrace with all her strength.

Horror and indignation at the attack of the King lent Bertha sufficient resolution for some time to repel him, and dragging herself to the open casement, she again screamed for help, till exhausted, and nearly fainting from the violence of her exertions, she heard, to her inexpressible delight, the sound of footsteps hastily ascending the turret-stairs.

The strong arm which held her in its grasp relaxed its hold at the sound, and the intruder hastily fled through the door by which he had entered, and which led through the main building, as Bertha sank in a swoon upon the floor.

When she recovered herself sufficiently to recollect the perilous situation in which she had been placed but a few minutes before, and to regain her scattered senses, she found herself supported in the arms of the person who had

so opportunely hastened to her assistance; and as a presentiment of his identity flashed across her brain, she hastily parted the dishevelled tresses from her face, and beheld in the clear moonlight the countenance of the favoured minstrel.

His drawn sword, which he had thrown down on his entrance, lay beside him; and as he bent over the lady he whispered words of comfort to her ear.

We have already said that the troubadours of this age were generally regarded, admired, and cherished; that they were invited to the courts of the greatest princes, and were the delight of the brave and fair, celebrating as they did the achievements of the one and the charms of the other in their lays and poems. In a word, that the admiration they acquired was so flattering, that youths of the highest rank became strollers and vagabond poets for the nonce.

It would not therefore have been much to be wondered at if the fair Bertha had received with favour the attentions of the hand-

some troubadour who sought to soothe her alarm, even though she thought him an utter stranger to her. As it was, she gave herself up to the delight of the moment; and whilst she confessed the obligation she was under to the gallant youth, she half betrayed the state of her heart.

The minstrel plainly saw there must be some mistake in the matter, as the lady, although he had never been in company with her before that evening, addressed words to him which bespoke a former acquaintance.

As, however, circumstances had thus luckily thrown him, at that soft hour, into the society of one so exquisite, and whom, moreover, he had scarcely hoped ever to approach, he felt proportionally elated with his good fortune, and poured forth his vows of unalterable love in a perfect delirium of rapture. He held the fairest form in Christendom encircled in his arm, and as he stood beside her and gazed in her radiant face he felt that

“ Not another comfort like to that, succeeds
In unknown fate.”

At length, after some time spent in those mutual vows, explanations, and soft nothings which, to those who love, “seem sweet in every whispered word;” as they watched the approach of dawn the fair Bertha began to recollect that to the most devoted lovers there must come a time of parting. While she bethought her also of many recent transactions which had taken place during her attendance on the Court, she considered it would be best for her to quit it with as little delay as possible. She resolved that it was unsafe for her to remain even for another hour under the same roof with the profligate King. She also knew enough of Elinor of Guienne to be assured that it was useless to inform her of her son’s behaviour, and claim her protection, and, as the Knight of Daundelyonne and his train had been despatched the day before with a large body of knights on an expedition into Normandy, she resolved, if she could procure an escort, to follow and place herself in safety under his protection.

With all the impetuosity of his character

her youthful companion volunteered to be her guide and champion; even if she adventured to the uttermost confines of the earth. With lovers all things, even the most romantic, seem possible, however great the danger and difficulties attending them.

The youth professed himself able to procure steeds, and even the attendance of a serving-man to accompany them, the only difficulty being to obtain egress, as he was in a manner a prisoner in that wing of the fortress.

Whilst they deliberated upon this new difficulty, the lady's eye was attracted by a sparkling gem which lay upon the floor of the chamber. As she stooped and picked it up, she found it was a ring of value, and, on a closer examination, it proved to be an ornament she had that night seen on the forefinger of the King, which had evidently been dislodged in the recent struggle. Here then was proof, if any were wanting, of the person and rank of her persecutor.

Her face flushed with anger as she recognised the bauble, and she was doubly resolved

to remove herself from the royal household without delay.

The ring furnished a ready means of doing so, as it was known to the guards, having been used as a pass by the King in various of his unscrupulous nocturnal adventures.

To a youth of the minstrel's fearless and chivalrous disposition, the proposed adventure was fraught with romantic interest, and, placing the ring upon his finger, he prepared to issue forth.

It was resolved that he should procure the attendant and steeds as quickly as possible, and—if the ring was available for that purpose—get them outside the walls of the town; after which he was either to send the serving-man, or himself return and fetch his fair charge.

Taking his glittering blade from the floor, he returned it to its sheath. He then bent his knee and kissed the hand of his mistress, and the next moment retired from the apartment.

Bertha leaned from the casement in a

state of almost breathless anxiety, as she listened to his receding footsteps. She heard the challenge of the sentinel, and her heart beat violently as she sought to catch the result. To her joy, after a short parley, she found that her lover had again passed on. Again he was challenged, and again he succeeded in satisfying the sentinel; after which distance rendered further knowledge of his progress impossible.

“O love, how perfect is thy mystic art.”

The proud Bertha was completely subdued by the blind God, so that, with the fallacious reasoning of an age, which allowed the high-born to accept the devotion of the lowly soldier, she determined that she neither was about to compromise herself nor her station by thus following the bent of her inclination, and she immediately set about preparing for her flight.

Partially changing her habiliments, she took off the splendid costume in which she had appeared at the ball, and donned her rid-

ing gear. This occupied her but a short time, and she then waited patiently in hope of the speedy re-appearance of her favourite.

Whilst she listened for his returning footsteps, and watched the almost imperceptible approach of the breaking dawn, her thoughts turned upon the hurried events of the few short weeks since she had left her home in Kent, and then she thought upon that home itself, and the happy life she had hitherto led there.

The bustle and whirl of events whilst with the royal army, and the circumstance and grandeur of such a power as had beaten their drums and spread their colours through the land, to one of her high feelings had a powerful charm. 'Twas like the reality of one of those high-flown romances she had been wont to peruse in her own hall. But then again, all this splendour and magnificence, this chivalrous pomp and regal pride, had their drawbacks, as we have seen. In her own home she had been the idol of all around; the

queen of that little court she presided over; the wonder of those of inferior degree who dwelt in her neighbourhood, and the admired by all who visited beneath the turrets of her father's castle; whilst during her short sojourn in the royal household, although she had still been the observed of all observers, she had felt herself in comparison but as a drop of water in the ocean. She felt, too, that she had, by her flighty and inconsiderate conduct, lost the friendship of the companion of her youth; one whom, although she had experienced no tender sentiments towards him, she had yet always honoured for his high and chivalrous feelings; and of whom, now he was supposed to have fallen in the recent battle, she for the first time found the real value. Ambition had caused her father to bring her with him. He wished that dazzling star of beauty to revolve in, what he considered its proper orbit. The high-minded and knightly Daundelyonne, himself knowing no guile, in his simple honesty thought not of the

dangers his daughter's beauty might provoke in the court and camp of the licentious John. In placing Bertha with Elinor of Guienne, however, he had committed her to the custody of an incarnate fiend, who knew no womanly touch of feeling, and whose iron heart would have consigned her to infamy or the stake for the slightest whim or gratification of him to whom she considered all wills should bow,—her unhallowed son.

The contemplations of Bertha were interrupted by the sound of approaching footsteps, almost ere she could have hoped for the return of the Minstrel, or those whom he might send in his stead. She, however, hailed the sound with joy, and looking forth from the narrow casement, beheld two figures standing in the gloom beneath. Although in the uncertain light of the moon, she failed in recognizing them, one, however, she thought bore some resemblance to her lover, whilst the other, a taller and much more bulky form, she concluded was the attendant he had procured to aid her in her

intended flight. The movements of the two figures, as she continued to regard them, confirmed her in this supposition. They seemed fearful of attracting observation from the other apartments in their vicinity, but gliding immediately beneath her own chamber, appeared to be carefully making out its windows. As it had been arranged that she should join the youth so soon as he appeared, or any one he might send, bearing the King's jewel, she immediately descended the stairs of the tower and joined them.

The figures were both in complete armour from head to heel, and as she emerged were on the point of opening the door of the turret. They were both evidently surprised at her appearance, and drew back a pace. No suspicion of mistake, however, crossed her mind, although at a glance, as she approached nearer, she plainly saw that neither of them was her lover; and with the thoughtlessness of one little conversant with the villany of the world, she furnished them with the means of deceiving her.

"You have the King's ring?" she said, hastily, as the taller stranger stepped at once towards her.

"We have, lady," he said, "or we should hardly have passed the guard."

She thought she recognised the voice as one she had heard that very night at the ball, a circumstance that rather encouraged her than otherwise, supposing that both the strangers were friends, and in the confidence of the Minstrel.

"And the horses," she inquired, "are they in readiness?"

"They are, lady," returned the taller figure, "they stand without the barbican of the castle. A short walk will bring us to them after we have gained the court-yard."

"And do you both escort us?" inquired the lady.

"We do," replied the other, "and a whole plump of spears will further ensure your safety."

Bertha made no further inquiry. Dreading lest their voices might be heard, and putting

herself under their guidance, she hastily descended to the court-yard of the castle, whence they passed the different sentinels, by virtue of some countersign her conductors seemed in possession of, and quickly gained the outside of the fortress.

A few moments more, and she was mounted on a fleet steed, and found herself surrounded by the party who had the charge of escorting her. Ere they started, however, the taller of the strangers took his comrade a few paces apart and held a brief conference with him.

"This is an extraordinary and lucky chance," he said, "a few moments more and we should have been forestalled. The fair Bertha, you see, was prepared for flight. Methinks, I know the upstart who intended to carry her off."

"By're Lady," said the other, "I hardly expected to have been able to achieve the proud beauty without considerable risk and trouble. 'Tis, indeed, a lucky chance, this."

"Make the best of your road ere her flight be discovered, and leave me to put her pursuers

off the scent. So soon as I have executed the commission I am employed upon I will join you. Meanwhile, hold my house against the world till I do so. Farewell; and remember your own prosperity depends upon my success in wooing. Be wary and vigilant, and good fortune come to thee: in a week, at farthest, I will myself join thee."

"Not sooner?" inquired the other.

"No," replied the taller cavalier. "Suspicion might fasten on me, and I have to visit Brittany in the meanwhile."

"Depend upon my fidelity, Sir Knight," returned the other, and putting himself at the bridle-rein of the lady's palfrey, he gave the word to move forwards, and the party were speedily some miles from Mirabeau.

CHAPTER VII.

How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds,
Makes deeds ill done ! Had'st not thou been by,
A fellow by the hand of nature mark'd,
Quoted and signed to do a deed of shame,
This murder had not come into my mind.

SHAKESPERE.

Within this bosom never entered yet,
The dreadful motion of a murderous thought.
And you have slandered nature in my form ;
Which, howsoever rude exteriorly,
Is yet the cover of a fairer mind
Than to be butcher of an innocent child.

IBID.

It is not our purpose to paint at full the dire situation of the town of Mirabeau and its inhabitants, while the court and camp of John and Elinor were within and around it. In former days, when war seemed the business of life, the pastime of the great, a town situated as Mirabeau was at that moment ; its citizens oppressed with unbridled thousands,

was certainly not in such dire extremity of misfortune as the adverse town given over to sack and siege. Yet still, in all the rude ferocity of the age whilst, fresh from recent strife "the fleshed soldier, with conscience wide as hell," roamed through the crowded streets and thoroughfares, he was by no means a pleasant guest to entertain in a respectable city. The night-shriek disturbed the curtailed sleep, and blessed was the hour when, by "tuck of drum," the greater part of the English army marched forth from the walls of Mirabeau.

On the morning of the departure of Bertha, the town, was, if possible, in a more confused and distracted state than it had been since the horrors of the recent conflict and siege. Large detachments of the English were continually pouring through its gates and thronging and choking up its streets, whilst, at the same time, strong bodies of Brabançons, which had joined the King on his advance upon the place, were now marching out.

John, although he was celebrated occa-

sionally for the swiftness of his movements, and the rapid and extraordinary marches he made, and by which he more than once amazed and discomfited his enemies, invariably gave himself up to indolence and luxury the moment the successful blow had been struck, in place of following up the advantage. He had accordingly, in this latter instance, pursued the same ruinous plan, wasting the precious moments which ought to have been used, in feasting and revelry.

The royal army now, however, was on the eve of departure from Mirabeau. Their destination was Arques in Normandy, before which place Philip of France and his chivalry had just been lying. The royal cortège was to follow with John, who only waited for Isabella, his Queen, to join him, she being expected in a few days.

On the morning of the events we have narrated in the last chapter, the King arose from his couch in no very enviable frame of mind. One of those periodical fits of gloom which so frequently succeeded his more lively feelings,

had possession of him, and when this evil disposition held the mastery he was a fearful object to encounter, for his gloomy temper seemed to eat into his own heart.

Since his late success before Mirabeau, and the capture of Prince Arthur, he had been elated beyond all bounds, and had lavished his attentions upon the ladies of the court during the balls and revels he had held in that town, disgusting and affronting the knights and barons in his train by the insolence of his manners and conduct towards their wives and daughters. The re-action of this exuberant state of feeling, however, was proportionally great. His joy at having so quickly got the Prince into his power had vanished apparently on the instant his amusements began to pall upon the senses. "The snake," he reflected, "was scotch'd, not killed." Treachery, cruelty, and tyranny succeeded to folly, levity, and licentiousness. Thoughts of murder now pervaded his mind.

On this morning, as was not unfrequently his custom, he sat moody, silent, and discon-

tented in his apartment for some hours after he arose, so that the attendants, who knew his disposition at such times, forbore to tempt the danger of his wrath by interrupting him. Even the Queen-mother, who had sent to desire an audience early on that morning, had been denied access.

At length, after a long communion with his own evil thoughts, he sent for one of his attendants, named De la Bray, and commanded that no one should presume to interrupt them during the conference they held together.

De la Bray was a soldier of fortune; a brave and honest, although a rough-hearted man, the harshness of whose features, and athletic and somewhat ungainly form, had caused the King to take a wrong estimate of the blunt Norman's character. Accordingly, he thought he could safely confide to him the atrocious business which at the moment lay nearest his heart.

Shaking the gloom from his countenance, therefore, as soon as De la Bray entered, he commenced one of his treacherous orations, and professions of service towards him, and at

length fully expounded the cruel commission he wished him to undertake.

The rough soldier at first either could not or would not understand the full drift of the proposal submitted to him, till at length the King, in express terms, honoured him with full powers to murder the young Duke of Brittany.

De la Bray was seized with so much horror at the suggestion, that he startled the tyrant by his denouncement of so villanous a proposal, and concluded, by positively refusing compliance.

“Your Highness hath mistaken my poor services whilst in your household,” he said; “nor do I know to what action of my life I am indebted for so vile an affront. Although poor, my liege, the De la Brays are gentlemen, not hangmen*.”

The eye of the King flashed upon the bold soldier with an expression of deep resentment; it then sought the ground as De la Bray steadily returned his gaze, and a pause ensued

* Such was the exact reply William de la Bray returned to John upon his tempting him to murder Prince Arthur.

which was felt awkwardly by both. At length the King resumed the conversation.

"'Tis well, good De la Bray," he said; "your refusal has raised you in our esteem. We but sought, in sooth, to try the integrity of your mind, ere we put you upon a service of some little trust and importance concerning the Prince."

"I am bounden to your Grace," returned De la Bray, his haughty and incredulous tone and bearing showing the deep disgust and thorough knowledge he entertained of the King's unscrupulous character.

"Our present conference," continued John, "must pass from your memory, good De la Bray."

"Your Highness need not doubt my truth and loyalty," returned the soldier; "besides I have taken the oath your Majesty proffered me at the commencement of my services."

The King directed a shrewd glance at De la Bray. He saw that he had, indeed, made a wrong estimate of his character, and that in

submitting his infamous proposition to him, he had committed himself.

The readily expressed repugnance of the honest soldier had also wrought scruples in the mind of John, and he was tossed with doubts as to the best plan to pursue, and sought to tamper with De la Bray until he could secure him. He, therefore, again affected to treat the conference he had just held as a mere touchstone to try the honesty of the man, and once more hinted at employing him on a service of some import, in the execution of which the association of a friend would be necessary. Summoning, therefore, an attendant, he desired De Bossu to be instantly ordered into his presence, whilst he busied himself in sealing a despatch he affected to desire might be carried to Hubert de Burgh at Falaise.

As soon as De Bossu made his appearance, the King proceeded to give De la Bray his commission, and the soldier, without a word, bowed and withdrew.

As the Bravo followed, a glance of intelli-

gence passed between him and his master. The King's finger was upon his curled lip, and as the recognition took place, he dropped it and pointed to the earth.

The Bravo knew the sign: it was equivalent to the death-blow of his fellow-traveller.

"So," said John, as soon as he was left alone, "my followers grow scrupulous and over-nice, methinks. By the mass, I must weed all such conscientious knaves from my household, or we shall scarce thrive in these wars. By Heaven," he continued, as he paced his chamber, "a common sworder here, whom we have ourself promoted from the very scum of Normandy to be our own personal servant, dare to boast himself of his gentility, and affront us with his dangerous scruples! Pah, I would have all such ungrateful varlets flayed alive, and their hides dressed up into horse-furniture!"

The good temper of the King was not much mended by an interview he subsequently held with Walter Mauluc, who had just arrived with secret intelligence from Falaise, in which the knight communicated the growing interest the

warden Hubert took in his prisoner. It was this piece of intelligence which had hastened the arrival at Falaise of the parties we have already seen in a former chapter.

The unscrupulous monarch immediately inquired if Sir Raoul de Brabant had yet departed upon the mission to Brittany, with which he was entrusted, and on being informed that some part of his followers had already set forth, and that the knight himself was prepared to leave so soon as he had taken his last instructions, the Monarch desired he might be instantly summoned. It was during this conference that the King threw himself upon the good-feeling, as he termed it, of the two worthy councillors he had called to his aid, disclosing to them his new-found fears, in regard to suddenly depriving the Prince of life, and darkly hinting at other means of unfitting him for rule, by loss of eye-sight and horrible mutilations.

Walter Mauluc instantly undertook the commission, making it a proviso that he should be joined in it by the Brabançon, who had

rather scrupled at being mixed up in so diabolical a transaction. The promises of rich reward, however, at length, gained the latter over to the acceptance of the vile office*.

Hardly was the above conference finished—indeed, the two assassin knights were at that moment making their congé to their employer—when the attendant who had before been summoned, intimated that he had a message for the Monarch's private ear, and informed him that Bertha Daundelyonne had fled from the castle.

Sir Walter Mauluc stopped short, as his ear caught the import of the message, and he looked hard at the King.

The intelligence indeed was somewhat ill-timed, for John had given a promise to Mauluc—which, by the bye, he never intended to keep—of bestowing the Lady Bertha upon that worthy, as a reward for his many services.

* Some of John's councillors, says Ralph, Abbot of Coggeshall, suggested to the King the propriety of unfitting Arthur for rule by blinding and horrible mutilation.

“Did I hear aright, your Highness?” inquired Mauluc; “hath the maiden of Daundelyonne fled from Mirabeau?”

“By our Lady’s grace, it appears so,” answered John, doggedly, being at the same time half inclined to turn the subject into laughter. “We cannot restrain a roving dame, good Mauluc, by anything but the silken cords of Cupid. Speak out, sirrah,” he continued, addressing the attendant, “what is the intelligence thou hast just whispered in our ear? These noble gentlemen are in our entire confidence.”

“The Queen-mother greets your Majesty,” said the attendant, “and is desirous of an audience. Her Highness bade me deliver privately in your royal ear that the heiress of Daundelyonne has absented herself from the castle. On inquiry it has been discovered that she must have availed herself of the assistance of the unknown minstrel lately haunting the court, who was seen by the sentinels on duty to quit the wing of the castle in which the lady was lodged, after which

she herself also passed out in company with two attendants, supposed to have been in his employ."

"Now, by Our Lady's grace," exclaimed the King, "this is something extraordinary, and must be looked to. Hath pursuit been ordered?"

"It hath, my liege," returned the attendant. "But her Highness waits to learn your royal wishes on the subject, as to the direction most likely to overtake the fugitives."

"How mean ye by that, Sir Knave?" said the King; "do ye suppose us cognizant of the proceedings of every errant damsel in our mother's court?"

"Her Highness has discovered from the sentinels on duty," said the attendant, "that the Minstrel passed by presenting your own private signet."

"Ha!" said John, glancing at his forefinger, and discovering the absence of the ring for the first time, "then, by St. Paul, the caitiff minstrel must have stolen it from us. Let instant pursuit be made."

“And for the direction,” remarked Sir Raoul of Brabant, “methinks I can aid you, as I myself now recognize the party I saw before daybreak, leaving the city-gates. They made for the road to England.”

“Your Highness will pardon me,” said Mauluc, who had looked exceedingly blank during this intelligence, “but methinks my part in the commission you have honoured us with, hath become somewhat altered.”

“Tush, man,” said the King, “we shall recover these foolish runagates ere set of sun, depend on’t; and if not, the matter is easily remedied. We have other wards at our disposal, beside this Kentish beauty. The Heiress of Mulgrief, Sir Mauluc, shall supply her place. What think ye, Sir Knight? Her possessions are twice as ample, and her face quite as fair.”

“The Heiress of Mulgrief,” said Mauluc, musing, “might indeed do so; and I have then your Highness’s promise to that effect, in case the lady of Daundelyonne should not be forthcoming?”

“You have, good Mauluc,” replied the King; “and now, gentlemen, let me urge you to use all despatch.”

“We humbly take our leave,” said Mauluc, bowing, “and trust to send intelligence from Falaise that shall completely set your royal mind at rest.”

“Use our commission with all prudence,” said John; “you understand me? We would avoid extremity in this affair. Adieu, gentlemen; the time will come when I can better show my sense of this service.”

A few minutes after the departure of Mauluc and the Brabançon, intelligence was brought to the King that the Minstrel was taken. It appeared he had never left the town, and that having been captured during the preceding discussion, he had been confined by order of the Queen-mother, in one of the dungeons beneath her own apartments.

“Then by our Lady’s grace,” said the King, “we must deliver the masker from our mother’s clutch once more, or she will make short work on’t with him.”

CHAPTER VIII.

Mighty power, all powers above !
Great unconquerable love !
Thou who liest in dimple sleek,
On the tender virgin's cheek :
Thee the rich and great obey ;
Every creature owns thy sway :
O'er the wide earth, and o'er the main,
Extends thy universal reign.

SOPHOCLES.

FOR many days the young Lord of Folkstone lay apparently bereft of life and motion. His loss of blood had been great, and from having lain so long in the open field without proper assistance, it seemed more than probable he would sink under the severity of his wound.

An apostate monk, however, who knew something of leechcraft, and who was one of the banditti, attended him in this extremity. But there was one whose careful nursing did more towards his restoration than a whole

fraternity of friars, with all the *Materia Medica* of the time to back them, could have effected. In fact, the greatest danger to which the young Knight was exposed had arisen from the slipping of the bandage which bound up the ghastly thrust he had received, hour after hour, the devoted page sat and watched beside his heathy couch.

It was an edifying sight to behold that stripling's care and attention; and so thought the captain of the banditti, and many of his minions. At times, and for hours together, the page was left alone with his wounded charge, in this dismal cavern, with nothing to disturb the solitude and dark horror of the place, but that which rendered it more hideous; namely, the heavy breathing common to those who suffer from great loss of blood, the constant dripping of the water-drops from the roof, and the subterranean roar of the black stream which rushed through the rocky chasm. A single lamp suspended near the sick Knight's couch, was, at such times, all the light that illumined the cavern. The imagination of

the poor page frequently, at such times, played him wild tricks, and as familiarity with the darkness around enabled his accustomed vision to pierce some of the deep recesses on either hand, it seemed to him that the most hideous and demoniac forms, in all the extraordinary shapes his disturbed fancy presented them, danced and flitted about the rocky labyrinths, and mopped and mowed at him as he sat.

As hour after hour thus passed, and his straining orbs, at times piercing through the gloom, enabled him to see the black roaring tide whose constant rushing threatened to disturb his reason, he almost thought, that maddened by his situation, he could have found relief by plunging headlong into the pitchy stream. What, he thought, if his charge, already nearly exhausted, and struggling with death, should expire in this dreadful cavern! How should he himself be able to bear the thought of being left entombed alone in the bowels of the earth, without becoming frenzied? What if the banditti, in their excursions and predatory expeditions were to be

overcome by their foes, and taken, or cut off; how would it be possible ever to escape, even if his charge should recover? Still, the devoted loyalty of the poor page never for a moment deserted him, but hour after hour, and day after day, saw him still tending and watching over the wounded knight.

The dreadful solitude of the robber's cave, however, was not unfrequently changed for a very different scene. After a successful expedition, when the parties returned, there ensued a scene of such revelry and enjoyment, as none but the gentlemen of the shade, the sons of rapine and unbridled license, could conceive or execute.

At length, the care and attention of the page were rewarded, and he saw the young knight in a fair way of recovery. It was then that the solitude of the cavern was exchanged for the companionship most coveted on earth by both, and it became like—

“The Elysian dream of lovers when they love.”

As the Knight reclined upon his couch, with

the white hand of the page clasped in his own, whilst he poured forth his thanks for the devoted care bestowed upon him, the keen eye of love was not to be deceived, even in that dark souterrain. The page of the Lady Bertha Daundelyonne was in truth the poor girl he had rescued from destruction in England. Her habiliments failed in deceiving the young Knight, and she stood—

“A maid confessed in all her charms.”

Few situations could be more romantic than that in which the young noble now found himself. Possessing all the high and chivalrous devotion professed by the knightly and noble for the softer sex, but which many of the licentious Normans during this reign merely professed, whilst their acts belied such profession, this youth found himself suddenly thrown in contact with the girl whose appearance, although so slightly seen, had taken so strong a hold upon his imagination, that he had never forgotten her; and as he now again recognised her, having full leisure to mark her extraordinary beauty, it is not to be wondered at, if

he felt deeply and hopelessly in love. To have found this fair creature the tenant of a cottage, whilst engaged in the ardour of the chase, and to have been tended by her when resting from its fatigues, would have been quite enough to have caused most men to have fallen headlong in love. Nay, even to have casually met one so exquisitely beautiful, in the festive hall, amongst his equals, during the dance, the young noble felt would have sealed his fate. But to have saved, and been saved from death, in a manner so extraordinary, and to be afterwards thrown together, —entombed, as it were, by the blind god,—was a fate from which there seemed no escape. Escape, however, was far from the thoughts of the pair ; and, for the first few hours after the young Knight became certain of the identity of his attendant, the time was spent in pouring forth his thanks for her attention and kindness, and gazing upon a form which to his enamoured eyes seemed indeed—

“ Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear.”

Like Imogen in the cave of Belarius,—

although she looked some goddess in disguise, yet she busied herself in making the Robberhold in which she was located, as neat as some lady's bower; arranging the few articles of furniture, and the arms or fragments of armour with which it was cumbered, so as only a woman's taste would have conceived.

Then her neat cookery astonished the Knight, as he lay helpless upon his couch, and watched her graceful movements, whilst angel-like, she sang during her employment.

“ She cut the roots in character,
And sauced his broth, as Juno had been sick,
And she her dieter.”

Like Imogen, too, there was at times a melancholy in her tones and countenance, which seemed strangely at variance with the lustre of her laughing eye. She yoked—

“ A smiling with a sigh : as if the sigh
Was that it was, for not being such a smile ;
The smile mocking the sigh, that it would fly
From so divine a temple, to commix
With winds that sailors rail at.”

As the young Knight lay thus helplessly

upon his couch, his mind torn with the conflicting thoughts and emotions consequent upon his peculiar situation, deeply did he at that moment feel the misery of being prostrate and helpless. 'Twas not for himself he grieved, but he reflected upon the situation of her he loved, and the danger to which she was exposed, thus imprisoned among a horde of banditti, whose eyes would be as likely to pry into and detect her disguise, as his own. Should such be the case, he trembled to think of the fate of one so young and lovely. The laws of the band, he knew were strict, permitting no female to be resident in their fastness. To introduce a woman into the cavern, except as a prisoner, was death to any one who attempted it, besides being almost certain destruction to the unhappy being so introduced. This regulation had been made from the circumstance of their having been once betrayed by some women who had sojourned with them. Those females, therefore, who became prisoners, were kept apart until they were ransomed, or they were conducted blind-

fold to the upper air ; but under no circumstance was a woman allowed at large within the secret cavern.

Then again, the young Lord of Folkstone was as proud of his birth and station as he was chivalrous and honourable. To wed anything beneath him in station was a dreadful idea. He was one of those who look to antiquity of descent and nobleness of birth in a wife as attributes of the highest consideration.

This it was which had led him to suffer an engagement to be contracted between himself and Bertha Daundelyonne. Her descent from the royal Saxon covered, in his estimation, a multitude of minor faults.

Under these circumstances the young Knight found himself tied down, as it were, to the stake by the blind god, so that he could neither fight nor fly, and his mind was tossed and tormented with ten thousand fears for her he so deeply loved, and alarm for his own firmness of purpose under temptation.

To save the fair creature, thus thrown in his way, from the slightest harm, or most trivial

insult, he would have taken lance in hand, and met the united shock of a host of opponents: he would have traversed the uttermost parts of the habitable world to serve her; but to wed her was fraught with eternal disgrace to the proud house of Folkstone and Goulstone, and to make her his without marriage, granting he could succeed in such a piece of villany, after her devotion and service, was quite opposed to his principles of honour. In short, the young Lord of Folkstone was a pure specimen of a Quixote of his day, a preux chevalier, who ought, indeed, to have lived a few centuries earlier, when errants really strolled about to deliver distressed damsels, peasants dined upon acorns, and Corin sat all day playing on pipes of corn, and versing love to amorous Phillida.

The banditti were at this time fully employed, for the warfare which now raged on all sides gave them rare scope for their avocations. Their services, too, were not unfrequently required in the field, it being no uncommon thing for leaders of renown, at that

period to seek the assistance of such troops, and whose captains brought to the field fellows ready for any duty, however hazardous and desperate. Indeed, the horrors sometimes practised in that rude age, even by the regular troops of the baronial leaders when in an enemy's land, were no whit inferior to what was perpetrated by the most savage of banditti. Woe to the poor peasant whose home was situated near the seat of war! Woe to the devoted town in the line of the advancing power! Rapine, murder, and unheard-of brutality, were the sport and pastime of the ferocious man-at-arms when once engaged in war. Not satisfied with the bare slaughter of men, women, and children, the fleshed soldier of the eleventh century was frequently an incarnate fiend, inflicting wanton torture in his mad career. "Some poor wretches," says a chronicle of the times, "were burned in their dwellings helplessly; some, less fortunate, were tortured within them by being hanged up by the heels over slow fires; many were hanged up by the thumbs and beards, with weights of

armour attached to their bodies ; many were starved when taken prisoners. They burned all towns in the adverse fields. They ravaged right and left : to till the ground was to plough the sea. Thou might'st march a day's journey in rear of the advancing army, and find all blackened ruin ; not a man to be seen sitting in a town ; not a hearth to be viewed but on which the inmates lay unhandsomely slaughtered, their grain scattered abroad, their walls thrown over."

Whilst the banditti were fully engaged, and the Knight and his fair attendant left to themselves, in course of time the grievous wound of the former began to show signs of amendment ; but it was long before the invalid could venture to walk about the cave alone. Two individuals belonging to the band were always stationed in the cavern during the night, though their place of repose seemed to the Knight and his companion beyond the dark stream which separated them from the upper world. They generally paid a visit to the interior once or twice in the twenty-four

hours, bringing food and other necessaries, and performing the work of serving-men; carrying fuel, lighting fires; and, by order of their captain, during his absence, they occasionally proffered their attendance upon the wounded Knight.

While thus situated, the course of true love might have been supposed to have run smooth as the gentle current which glides beneath the summer sun. But man is a strange animal, and, unlike the gentler sex, security never fails to beget with him a feeling of carelessness towards the being beloved. Although the Lord of Folkstone was in very truth deeply and hopelessly enamoured of his fair attendant; whilst he felt secure of her reciprocating the feeling of attachment, the sense of her inferiority in station so wrought upon him, that he hardly knew the extent of his passion. The difficulties of his situation in thus having, as he supposed, so young and beautiful a creature thrown upon his sole care, tormented him; and under these circumstances, although the livelong day was spent in admiring her

graceful beauty, not a word of love escaped his lips.

At length, one day when the Knight felt his strength considerably restored, he ventured for the hundredth time to thank his attendant for her continued care. "'Tis not long," he said, "ere I shall be enabled to bear the weight of my armour, and then we will leave this dismal refuge, and seek other and fairer scenes."

His young attendant sighed, "It will doubtless be a happy day, my Lord," she said, "when you again see the bright sun of heaven, the glitter of arms, and once more feel the bounding steed."

"It will, indeed," returned the Knight, brightening at the thought. "None but he whose whole soul is filled with military ardour can understand the thrill of delight with which the true soldier beholds his banner spread in the hostile field, and hears the blast of trumpet and the roll of drum."

"And you will no more remember," said the sometime Page, "this gloomy cavern, and

the hours spent in pleasing converse with your poor attendant. That which in after-life will be regarded but as an inky spot, an idle blot in your bright career, will be remembered by me as the bright star in my existence, since I shall consider that I, in some sort, returned the obligation you conferred upon me."

"Nay," said the youth, "think not so meanly of me. I can never remember my sojourn in this singular place, and with so sweet a companion to while away the hours of sickness, but with pleasure. A whole life devoted to your service would but poorly repay the debt of gratitude."

The pair, during this conversation, were seated in the larger chamber of the cavern, the common apartment of the robbers when its tenants. It was evening, and the ruddy glow of the fire shone upon the figures of the Knight and his fair companion, exhibiting them in all the glow of their picturesque beauty, the dark rocky abyss as a back-ground. Bright arms and armour shewing here and there in various recesses on either hand, and

costly articles of value thrown in heaps in the various natural receptacles of the cavern. In fact, it was a scene and situation for the poet's pen and the painter's pencil.

There was a somewhat cold expression upon the Page's face, as she replied—

“Gratitude, my Lord, is a word used amongst mortals to express a virtue seldom, if ever, really felt or seen; and if it were, to me you owe it not. I but repaid the debt I owed. In you it was noble to step aside from your high station in order to save the poor peasant girl; in me it was but duty to aid the high-born soldier from death. It is not for one so humble to reap the guerdon of the smile I know belongs to another.”

There was a touch of bitterness in the girl's tone as she uttered this. Perhaps she was piqued at the studied care with which the young noble seemed to guard his words and actions, whilst his ever-following eye bore in its glance the love he felt. Perhaps, like the more manœuvring fair of modern days, she wished to precipitate a confession. Be

that as it may, her words, if she so meant, succeeded not, and there was that awkward pause in the conversation which lovers sometimes experience.

The youth arose from his seat and paced the cavern, whilst the fair attendant, after watching the curling smoke as it ascended to the roof of the cavern, apparently in deep thought for a brief space, suddenly caught up a sort of cittern which lay amongst other articles of spoil close at hand, and executing a short prelude, warbled forth a song; the cavern echoing with the powerful tones of her voice. The young Lord of Folkstone stood entranced. He had never heard so rich a voice so exquisitely modulated. The dark recesses of the cavern sent back a thousand echoes. It seemed to him that thus deep in the bowels of the earth, he was companioned by an angel from the skies, who had been sent to give him hope and comfort in his otherwise hapless confinement.

“For never had it yet been given,
To lips of any mortal woman,
To utter notes so fresh from heaven.”

How many hearts have been softened by music, and won by a song! How many gallants have been attracted towards a fair performer whose beauty would scarce have elicited a passing remark, but from the song's prosperity, which, like that of the jest, lieth in the ear of him that hears, "never in the tongue of those who utter it." The mighty power of love, whose sway every creature owns, and which had been hitherto kept within the strict bounds of propriety in the young noble's breast, now burst forth in all its ardour. To gaze upon that form in the becoming disguise which set off the charms it could not hide, to watch those white fingers as they touched the strings of the instrument with so much grace and skill, to behold that angelic countenance as she sang—thought in each tone, feeling in every inflexion—he felt he could have devoted a whole existence. The time, the locality, the solitude in which the pair were placed—all had their charm. The song ceased, and the high-born noble was at the singer's feet. Gently he stole the hand that had touched the strings of the

cittern, and ere the tones had died away he had carried it to his lips. There was no surprise — no startled expression of alarm or indignation on the part of the fair girl. Her head had been turned from him as she sang, or he might have seen a sudden and almost imperceptible start, and in her laughter-loving eye a slight expression of joy.

She withdrew not her hand, and the Knight covered it with kisses. She seemed, indeed, to enjoy the situation for a brief space, and waited for what she knew would be likely to follow this demonstration; and the young noble poured forth a whole volume of devotion and love at her feet after the fashion and flourish of that chivalrous age.

“Divine perfection!” he said, “radiant and exquisite as thou art, pardon the excess of love that makes me thus a suppliant at your feet. Long have I adored those peerless charms! long have I struggled to conquer the flame which consumes my heart! and here I cast myself before thee, never again to rise, unless you bid me hope.”

The lady shook back the glossy tresses which shadowed her cheek of cream, and which were worn, after the fashion of the youth of that day, to fall upon the shoulder, and slowly turned her face towards her lover.

“If, my Lord,” she said, in a somewhat serious tone, “you mean this in all truth and honour, however much I may be grateful for your condescension, I shall feel some touch of sorrow. If you sue to me to return a guilty passion, I shall more deeply grieve.”

“Myself, my lands, my towers, my vassals—all are thine!” exclaimed the enraptured noble.

The maiden, so warm in manner, so gentle before, now seemed suddenly become a monument, so cold and frigid was her demeanour.

“It can never be, my Lord,” she said; “there is a barrier between us which cannot be overleaped.”

How sudden is the revulsion of feeling sometimes experienced by the ardent lover. That which he trifles with whilst he imagines it is his own, and seems scarcely to value, suddenly

placed beyond reach becomes beyond the world's worth in his esteem.

"In the name of Heaven!" exclaimed the Knight, passionately, "cast me not into the depths of misery by such an assurance. What barrier can exist that I will not surmount for thy sweet sake?"

"The same which exists on thine own part," said the lady. "Thou art pledged to wed the fair Bertha Daundelyonne — betrothed, promised, engaged. I also am engaged to be the bride of——"

"Of whom?" said the young Lord, forgetting his weakness, and leaping to his feet. "By heaven! my rapier's point shall win thee from him!"

"Of the cloister," said the maiden, archly. "Your sword, my Lord, will scarce reach me there."

The Knight stood like one transfixed, whilst the maiden continued—

"Bethink ye, Sir Knight, for well I know your pride of birth. How would it sound to

the family of one whose banner flaps upon the towers of three castles in as many counties of fair England, that the heir of Folkstone had wedded a beggar girl? Listen, my Lord, and you shall have my story; 'tis brief, because I know but little of myself.

“The earliest impression I have of my infancy is associated with pomp and grandeur—vast halls, tender nurture, stately forms, and smiling faces. This leads me to infer that I first saw the light in some lordly castle, but whether in England, Normandy, or what other country of Europe, or whether the offspring of the owner of such fortress, or his meanest domestic, I am quite unable to say.

“I remember as a shadowy dream a small portion of my infancy enjoyed amidst the luxury of the great and powerful, and in company with an early companion, a twin-born brother, as I conceive.

“My next impression is of hardship and sharp misery. The cold comfort of the nightly bivouac, the march and the turmoil of the

camp, during which my childish companion and myself were nursed by some followers of the host, in the hot East.

“I took my next impressions of men and things as I came to years of observation, amongst a company of eastern masquers, Infidels, who haunted the steps of those who came to make war against them, and to whom, I conjecture, I had been sold by those who first kidnapped and brought me to Palestine ; but I had no longer a brother, if he were a brother whose companionship I remember in my infant wanderings. By these eastern strollers I was taught the accomplishments of the tribe—to dance before the tents of the noble, to sing and play during the banquet, when, under the burning sun of Syria, kings feasted each other amidst the mail-clad host.

“Young as I am, I beheld that mighty force animated by glory and religion, amounting to a hundred thousand men, and conducted by two warrior monarchs. Invincible as it looked, I beheld the united army of the cross melt away by famine, sickness, and the sword, to a

miserable fragment, which reached home broken and beggared men.

“I saw the Templars in the hot sands of the desert, when the Christian host had fled, seeking death with lance in rest, and battle-axe aloft, spurring hither and thither, and still carrying death amongst the infidels, but disdainingly to retire. Their iron forms sometimes were lost amidst the flame of the Greek fire, or enveloped by red smoke and increasing gloom. Fewer and more few they flashed like meteors shot from heaven, amidst the unbelievers, till, with morning’s dawn, they had all fallen. Honour,” continued the maiden, looking upwards, “honour to those devoted servants of the cross! They sought Paradise on the arid plains of Asia, and mighty and unconquered in death, they smote with their cross-hilted blades, like steeds jerking out their heels in agony where they had fallen.”

There was something singularly fascinating to the young noble in thus hearing an outline of the crusade, given by one so young and

interesting, and who seemed inspired by what she had beheld.

The expedition of Richard and his host to Palestine, was an all-absorbing and sacred theme. The Troubadours and poets still dwelt upon it in their lays, and those few warriors who had returned, and still lived, were accounted and regarded as we look up to the veterans of the war, amidst the peace-campaigning battalions of the present time.

That this all-accomplished creature should have trod the burning sands, and beheld the banner of the Crusaders in the field of strife, sharing the hardships of such a campaign, was something wonderful to think of, and the youth listened to her recital with breathless interest.

“At the truce for three years,” continued the girl, “by which the Christians were left in possession of the coast from Acre to Joppa, and the pilgrimage to Jerusalem was secured to them, the tribe to which I belonged returned to Europe, amongst those who were led back by the renowned Gilbert of Daundelyonne, after

enduring incredible hardships and miseries. In the castle-courts of England and Normandy I still continued to ply my vocation with my companions, amongst whom, as I grew older, I gained an ascendancy.

“Even young as I was, my proficiency in music was a continual source of gain to them, but I became disgusted with their life as I grew towards womanhood.

“Whilst a child, my performance upon the cittern had simply attracted the wonder and praise of those before whom we exhibited, but as I grew older, I became the object of insult and persecution from the youth of the camp and castle.

“In short, I perceived myself exposed to certain destruction, unless I could find the means of escape from the tribe to which I belonged. But as I was beloved and sought in marriage by the son of our chief, so strict a watch was kept upon me that for many months I could avail myself of no opportunity of leaving them.

“Under these circumstances, I made a solemn vow to Heaven, that if I failed of discovering

during my wanderings either the brother of my childhood, or some trace of my parents, that I would dedicate myself to the cloister at the age of eighteen.

“On leaving the tribe, in order to escape persecution, I assumed male attire; and, as a professor of the joyous science, I visited many countries in the hope of finding some trace of my parents.

“In my wanderings, however, I was still subjected to danger. My sex was discovered by some hunters, as I bathed my feet in the cool waters of a brook which meandered through a forest in Brabant, and to save myself I fled and sought the shelter of a secluded spot inhabited by the sorceress of Nivelles.

“With her I remained some time; and, as her art had rendered a sojourn in Brabant dangerous to her, we passed over to England, still in the hope of hearing some tidings of my parents, and for some months we resided under the cliff upon which stands the Roman town of Richborough. Without friends, except the kind creature who had succoured me in

my need, and who I quickly found was no witch, but a mere juggler, I was glad to remain, and Heaven raised me up a friend in one, with whom you yourself are acquainted, the jester Gondibert, who indeed professes to know something of my parentage.

“Through his instrumentality, when my female protector was killed and you yourself had rescued, and enabled me to find a refuge in the monastery of Salmstone, I was saved from the villany of the superior of that establishment, and succeeded in escaping.

“Under Gondibert’s advice I resumed my male attire, and he gave me in charge of the lady of Daundelyonne. Your Lordship may now guess the remainder of my story, and judge for yourself whether the poor wanderer, the nameless outcast, I have described, would be a fitting bride for the heir of Folkstone; even though she were not already the promised bride of Heaven. No: I vowed in my extremity that if the Virgin would save and protect me from dishonour whilst alone in this world of wickedness, I would dedicate the poor

remainder of my life to her service, and Heaven hath heard my prayer. An especial providence would seem to have protected the lone wanderer through dangers the most imminent, and without a friend in the world. Judge, Sir Knight, whether I can break so sacred an oath."

She ceased, and as the young noble gazed upon her,

"Bending to earth, resigned, the mournful eye,"

he still felt that love was all powerful. The confession of his lovely companion had even more endeared her to him. He felt, that with all his pride of birth and vast possessions, he was immeasurably inferior to one who had passed through such a life unsullied; for, in "her soul-lit face," as he listened to her story, he felt the truth of every word she uttered.

With all the eloquence of love, "strong as death," he still pleaded his suit, vowing a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in order to obtain for her absolution from her vow. Seizing her hand he again threw himself upon one knee,

when a slight clash, as of some armed person having changed his position, sounded in the cavern behind them. As the Knight sprang to his feet and laid his hand upon his sword, he beheld a tall dark figure standing in the gloom against an abutment of the rock only a few paces off.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TROUBADOUR.

More matter for a May morning.

SHAKESPERE.

By thine own tongue, thou art condemned, and must
Endure our law : thou art dead.

IBID.

THE fickleness of John's disposition rendered him so uncertain, that even his most familiar followers were sometimes astonished at the rapidity with which he passed from the most malignant frame of mind to an apparent state of amiability and contentment.

On the morning in which we have seen him give directions to the two instruments he despatched to Falaise, he experienced one of these transitions, appearing suddenly to emerge from beneath a weight of evil to a buoyant state

of enjoyment and good fellowship with all around.

Whether it was that the dire villany he had so long brooded over, now that he had set his instruments in motion, was, as it were, partially removed from his mind, we cannot take upon ourselves to say; but certain it is, that the monarch, after dismissing Mauluc and the Brabançon on their dreadful errand, seemed relieved from a weight of woe; and that which would have caused an ordinary person deep anxiety and remorse; in the interim between its action and accomplishment, appeared in John a state of absolute enjoyment. He had made the cast he contemplated ever since the Prince became his prisoner. He had found the instruments ready suited to his purpose, assayed their value, and found they answered the touchstone.

The English power, just at this time, was on the move. The division, with which the King intended himself to march, alone remaining in Mirabeau. The third day from the one in which Mauluc and the Brabançon were dis-

patched on their commission to Falaise was fixed for the royal departure. In the interim the news expected by the King arrived.

Meantime, on the morning of the departure of Mauluc and the Brabançon, and after the bosom of the King had been, in a measure, relieved of the perilous stuff which weighed upon his blackened heart, he gave orders to the nobles in attendance, and spent some part of the day in the apartments of the Queen-mother in easy conversation with the several ladies constituting her court.

The escape of haughty Bertha Daundelyonne caused him considerable annoyance; and to his further chagrin, he had the disappointment of hearing during the day, that the party despatched in pursuit had failed in tracing her a single step.

The Queen-mother had more than once suggested the propriety of putting the captive minstrel, and who, she felt assured, knew something of the whereabouts of the fugitive, to the torture, in order to extort the truth from him. But John, who had already caused that youth's

removal to a strong chamber in his own wing of the castle, only smiled at the suggestion, and would not for a moment listen to it.

“Your Highness is deceived in that extraordinary specimen of a troubadour,” he observed. “Believe me, whatever the fair Bertha might feel for him, his heart owns no answering flame. Nay, I am possessed of a secret concerning the youth which you little dream of.”

For some days after the flight of Bertha, the King had been so much occupied by matters of business and pleasure, that he had no leisure to think of the minstrel, although he fully intended the first moment he could spare from his other amusements to unravel the mystery in which the female, he imagined he had now in his power, was enveloped.

A conversation he subsequently held with the Queen-mother again bringing the minstrel to his remembrance, he suddenly resolved to pay the captive a visit. Summoning, therefore, a confidential domestic, he issued orders preparatory to carrying his intentions into effect.

In the first place, he directed a collation to be served in the captive's apartment, also desiring the messenger to intimate the King intended to honour him with a visit, and had sent his own lute, as he wished for a specimen of his skill.

The attendant received commands likewise, instantly to procure a suit of female apparel of the newest form and most costly materials, as the King was desirous of beholding the fair troubadour in a more appropriate costume, and one which would fully display her charming form.

"Am I then to understand," said the cringing servitor, "that the captive I have in charge is a female?"

"How," said John, opening his eyes and staring at the menial, "does one so experienced as thou doubt the fact? Why, man, we discovered as much in the first five minutes of the first interview we had with her."

"Has your Highness been able to learn any thing more of the history of this youth—I mean, this lady?" inquired the attendant.

“Nothing,” said the monarch. “Have you?”

“Absolutely nothing, your Grace,” returned the menial, bowing low. “I humbly take my leave in order to execute the commission entrusted to me.”

The King now signified it was his pleasure to take his evening repast alone, and desired it to be intimated to the Barons and Knights assembled in the hall, that he should not grace the board by his presence that night.

Meanwhile, the unlucky minstrel, having thus seen himself in so short a time deprived of all his bright hopes, was a solitary captive in an apartment in the royal quarter. As far as his treatment went, the prisoner had nothing to complain of. Having experienced, since his removal from the dungeon into which he had first been cast, every indulgence consistent with his safe keeping.

His high spirit, however, chafed under the circumstances of his arrest, and during the few hours he had been thus coerced, he felt the imprisonment of years.

The Provençal poets were, as we have before observed, famous at this period, not only in their own, but in other countries. They were called Troubadours or Finders, from the fertility of their invention; and were in reality the fathers of modern poetry. In the preceding reign they had been even more cherished. Richard the First had even himself become a troubadour for the nonce, and whilst a prisoner had written a poem, the first stanza of which being translated, runs somewhat thus:—

“ No prisoner his condition can explain,
But he will fall into a plaintive strain.
Yet to divert his sorrows he may sing,
Though he have friends, how poor the gift they bring.
Shame on them all! my ransom they deny,
And I in prison two long winters lie.”

The youthful minstrel, who, although English born, was almost a stranger to his native land, had acquired considerable fame in Germany and the East, in which latter portion of the globe indeed he had spent the greater part of his life. He had accordingly been a frequent guest at the courts and castles of the high-born; but as his indomitable spirit had led

him mostly amongst camps, and the alarums of war, he was as well skilled in all the military exercises of the time, as in the softer arts of poetry and minstrelsy.

Love had never taken possession of his heart until he suddenly beheld the fair Bertha Daundelyonne, and then he had felt that she was like some "bright particular star," beyond his sphere.

The disappointment and chagrin he therefore experienced at his present imprisonment was in proportion to his previous elation, at finding himself so unaccountably in favour where he had before neither acquaintance nor hope. At first, he felt all the wildness of despair when he found he could gain no decided information from the mute attendant who ministered to his wants, either of the fate of Bertha or the reason of his own captivity. On reflection, however, he began to suspect the King of having, by some means, become privy to his arrangements for the intended flight, and consequently of having given orders for his arrest. He immediately desired

his attendant to furnish him with writing materials; and, under the excited feelings consequent upon such supposition, he busied himself in composing a bitter satire upon John, in which he lashed the tyrant to his heart's content, exposing his vices and follies in the most glaring light.

He was engaged in putting the finishing touch to the composition, when the attendant again entered his chamber, bearing the refreshments, the instrument, the apparel, and the message the King had sent in anticipation of his own visit. Delighted with his performance, the youth scarcely marking one-half of what the menial uttered, repeated the last stanzas aloud as he held the composition with one hand, whilst with the other he seized the well-filled goblet he intended to drain, and which the servant had placed upon the table. As he carried the chalice to his lips, however, he was struck by the horror and dismay depicted upon the face of the attendant, who was perfectly aghast at the treasonable nature of the verses he had heard. Notwithstanding his ill frame

of mind, the minstrel was almost inclined to burst into laughter at the ludicrous expression of dismay he beheld, when his eye fell upon the female habiliments, and he demanded their intended use.

The menial again delivered his message in full, and in an instant received the contents of the goblet full in his face.

Not satisfied with this outbreak, the minstrel then seized upon the lute which lay upon the table, and in an instant smashed it over the head of the terrified attendant; who, turning in dismay, fled from the wrath to come with the instrument hampered about his neck.

Our hero was now so much excited, that he took a couple of turns across the chamber ere he perceived that in the hurry of his departure the serving-man had left the door open behind him. To see it and to determine upon escaping were but the thought of a moment, when, as he was about to spring towards the door, it was darkened by the figure of a man entering.

Under ordinary circumstances the impetuous youth would have endeavoured to make through all opposition, and dashing at the new comer, cut his way to freedom. But in this instance he stopped short as he was on the point of springing forwards, for in the dark stern face, curly beard, and elf locks of the person before him, he beheld the King.

The royal visitor was dressed in an evening costume which he had donned for the nonce, —a long loose gown, powdered and embroidered with gold, and girded at the waist with the jewelled belt containing his richly inlaid poniard. On his legs he wore scarlet hose also powdered with gold. Jewelled slippers were on his feet, a costly chain was around his neck, and his hair, beard, and whole person reeked with perfumes.

With an easy and familiar air, and scarcely looking the astonished minstrel in the face, the monarch approached, and seating himself in a chair before which the youth happened to stand at the moment, in lisping affected tones he commenced a fulsome address.

“We are truly sorry, Sir Troubadour,” he said, “at having been obliged to put so much restraint upon your person; but as we wished to secure your services entirely to ourself, we have been necessitated so to act. We hope, however, we have not altogether offended so exquisite a poet beyond the hope of pardon in this matter.”

“How am I to understand this badinage, Sir King?” replied the youth. “By my hali-dame, I am not used to be thus fooled. With all true duty towards your Majesty, I bid you beware, since you are alone, of carrying a jest too far with me.”

The tone of voice in which this reply was uttered, and which was more bold and manly than he had expected to be greeted with, startled the King. He raised his eyes and gazed intently upon the youth.

“Now, in the name of the foul fiend,” he said, as a new light seemed to break in upon him, “who and what have we here?”

“One against whom you have no just cause of complaint,” said the bold youth, “and whom

you have unjustly confined in your stronghold."

"Art thou not a follower of the Daundelyonne?" asked the King, in still greater surprise.

"I am follower of no man," returned the minstrel. "I accompanied the train of the good knight, Sir Walter de Wingham, from England, and struck a blow for him in the recent conflict. I am a troubadour, with license to go and come from court to castle, and from castle to cot, throughout Christendom; and shame be upon the heads of those who hinder one of my profession, without crime committed, or legal cause for so doing."

"Now, by St. Paul, we have been fooled and deceived in this matter," said the King. "What, ho! within there!" he called aloud, "secure this young traitor!"

Upon this summons, a couple of attendants immediately entered the apartment. The King managing, in all his adventures, to have assistance within hail in case of accident.

As the minstrel was unarmed, and the ruffianly-looking attendants were clad in a sort of demi-suit, and provided with weapons, he saw it would be useless to resist; and he was accordingly quickly seized in their iron gripe.

“By the mass,” said John, “we begin to alter, and be of our mother’s opinion in this matter. Thou art privy to the escape of Bertha Daundelyonne, young sir,” he continued, addressing the minstrel; “and art also aware of her destination and place of refuge.”

“And if I were so,” returned the minstrel, “no bribe that thou hast wit enough to offer would tempt me to divulge the secret.”

“Ha!” exclaimed the King, “but we will try that, Sir Knave. We will send those to thee who understand how to put the question in a somewhat different form to that wherein thou hast ever been subjected to. Ha! by St. Paul, do we not recollect to have heard a saying, whilst in England, that this page, minstrel, or devil here, hath been once convicted of witchcraft or magic?”

“Some such report hath been current, my Liege,” said one of the attendants, “inasmuch as he hath been distinctly seen in two places at one time.”

“And what have we here?” pursued John, casting his eyes upon the satire the young poet had just indited. “Take it up, sirrah,” he continued to the attendant, “and make known to us its contents.”

The serving-man took the paper as he was ordered, but he hesitated, and stammered when he attempted to read it. The contents, he thought, were of such a nature that even the innocent reciter of the verses would be likely to come in for a share of the royal indignation.

“’Tis but a poem,” said the man—“a wretched production, written by this person here, and scarcely worthy of your Highness’s ear.”

“Now, by the mass,” said John, “that is exactly the sort of production we wish to judge of. I took thee from the monastery of Bury St. Edmunds where thou wast a servitor

amongst the lazy brotherhood. Thou art a ripe scholar, therefore read, and let the poet hear his own verse."

"Might I so far venture to suggest," said the attendant, "I would say that, as the penmanship is rather cramped, the writer should himself be permitted to recite his own production to your Highness."

"Why, how now, Sir Knave," said the King; "thou art over-bold. Read, villain, lest I order thee to receive twenty lashes with horse-girths for every stanza penned there."

Upon this, the serving-man commenced the poem, but before he had concluded half a dozen lines, the King started up in a violent rage and snatched it from his hands.

"Hold, sirrah!" he exclaimed, in a voice of thunder. "By God's wrath, this beats anything we ever conceived or heard of! Unhappy was the hour, caitiff," he said, turning to the minstrel, "in which thou tookest upon thyself the trade of rhymer, and accursed the wit that conceived these lines. Thou art a dangerous companion to go at large; and, in so

far, we are fortunate in having found thee. Thou shalt die a cruel death to deter others from the pastime of satirising princes."

"I defy thee and thy tortures alike," said the undaunted youth. "I spit at thee, monster, and despise thee."

"Away with him!" vociferated the enraged John, "to the dungeon of the condemned! To-morrow let him be tortured till he confess all he knows concerning the flight of Bertha Daundelyonne; then let his eyes be torn out by the hangman. Ha! by my soul, have these malapert songsters so soon forgot the fate of Luke de Barra?"

It was, indeed, in this rude age, a most dangerous pastime to attempt a satire upon power. Henry the First had detected a poet named Luke de Barra in some such offence, and had condemned him to a cruel punishment not likely to be easily forgotten in after-times. He was condemned to have his eyes torn out, which sentence was accordingly executed, notwithstanding the intercession of many nobles in his favour.

King Henry was so much incensed against the satirist, that he is said to have returned for answer to the application of his nobles for mercy:—"No, sirs; this man, a wit, a minstrel, and a poet, hath misused his talents. He hath composed indecent songs in my disfavour, and sung them openly for the diversion of mine enemies. God hath delivered him into my hands, and he shall be punished to deter others from a like petulance."

The cruel sentence was accordingly executed on the unfortunate de Barra, who died of the wounds he received in struggling with the executioner.

The dreadful fate of Luke de Barra was, indeed, well known to the troubadours of the time, and the remembrance of his cruel death struck upon the heart of the youthful minstrel, as he heard himself condemned to the same fate by one remorseless as the iron from which he himself was to suffer.

The attendants were about to hurry him from before the face of the frowning monarch, when a messenger, who had been in search of

the King, announced the sudden arrival of Walter Mauluc from Falaise.

The countenance of John underwent a sudden change at the news. A sort of revulsion of the heart seemed to ensue, and, from the deep red of uncontrolled rage, his cheek and brow suddenly became deadly pale, and then as quickly resumed their ordinary colour. He appeared to start at the announcement.

“So suddenly!” he muttered. “Mauluc returned so suddenly! What may this portend? Is he alone?” he inquired of the messenger.

“Alone, my liege,” returned the man.

“Wait on him hither, Sirs,” said John, quickly—instantly. Stay, Sirs,” he continued, addressing himself to the men-at-arms who held the minstrel, “we have not leisure at this moment to hear the report of your questions with yonder malapert poet. Let him be dealt with at high noon to-morrow.”

The minstrel was accordingly hurried from the chamber at the same moment Walter Mauluc, armed from head to heel, entered it.

“How now, Sir Knight!” enquired the King.
“Your news. Good, an’ Heaven will.”

“Your Highness must be the best judge of that,” answered Mauluc. “My news is, however, not bad. It might have been better, if my true duty towards your Grace’s service had not been thwarted.”

“Doth Arthur live?” inquired the King.

“He does, my liege.”

“Then, caitiff as thou art, and whom I have raised from the very scum of Poiteau to be my own esquire, how can thy news be good?”

“I live but to obey your royal orders,” said Mauluc, “and would willingly die for the convenience of one I so highly honour.”

“To the infernal fiends with your professions of service!” said the enraged King. “I thought we understood each other better. Whilst Arthur lives I am in fear.”

“Your royal commission extended not to death,” returned Mauluc; “nevertheless, I had made the business sure, if Hubert de Burgh had not taken upon himself to suspend matters until your Highness was further consulted.”

"Where tarries Sir Raoul de Brabant?" inquired John.

"He departed, so soon as matters were interfered with, in order to collect his followers, and proceeded on the other mission your Highness gave him regarding the damsel of Brittany."

"All wrong, by St. Paul," said John, pacing the apartment. "We wished this business first to have been transacted, and to have watched the tempers of those around ere we pounced upon the fair Breton."

The King now again paced the apartment for some moments, but suddenly, however, seemed to recollect himself.

"Get some refreshment, Sir Knight," he said, "and forgive the comments my anger made. To-morrow you must return towards Falaise, good Mauluc. We must trust this matter entirely to your especial guidance; as it is, believe me, I am much bounden to you for the ready zeal you have displayed."

So saying, the King sought yet more to repair his former rudeness, and leant upon Mauluc's shoulder as they left the apartment

to proceed to his own chamber, where he inquired more fully into the nature of the proceedings.

Mauluc gave him a full and circumstantial account of the interference of Hubert, adding a few flourishes of his own in the hope of incensing the King against the Warden of Falaise. Without however gaining his object, as the King uttered no word of anger against Hubert, merely remarking that he should remove the Prince from the custody of that Knight, and change his place of imprisonment.

“Yes,” he said, “Sir Mauluc, to-morrow we will give thee full powers. The Prince shall to Rouen as speedily as may be.”

John now ordered refreshments to be served in his own apartment, and even condescended to invite Mauluc to sit down and partake with him. Scarce, however, was this meal commenced, when another messenger was announced, bearing important despatches.

“We will be no further molested now,” cried John, petulantly. “’Tis but some despatch

from the Knight of Daundelyonne or Lord Salisbury. To-morrow will be time enough to peruse it. Drink, Sir Knight," he said, raising his goblet. "Come, fill. 'Here's to the health of the fair Clotilde, the heiress of Mulgrief.'"

"If I might venture to interrupt your royal Highness," said the attendant, "the Knight of Daundelyonne hath certainly sent a packet of importance by the jester Gondibert, which reports the party he commanded as being nearly all cut to pieces, Sir Gilbert's son being amongst the slain."

"We care not for them, sirrah," said John. "Were the race of Daundelyonne — always excepting the fair Bertha, Sir Mauluc — sent to the other world, we see no reason our meal should be interrupted, and our digestion disturbed."

"Nevertheless," urged the man, "your Highness will be good enough to bear with me, whilst I tell from whence comes the messenger whom I especially wish to announce."

"Hence, villain," exclaimed John, starting

up, and now somewhat flustered; "wouldst thou dare the lion's fangs?"

"He is from ——" proceeded the man, retreating towards the door, yet still holding out the despatch he knew it would be fatal not to deliver—"He is from ——"

"Falaise," said Gondibert, entering and snatching the packet from the serving-man, at the same time stepping up and presenting it to John. "Read it, cousin," he said. "Ever follow knowledge wherever it is to be found. Like fern-seed, it is the produce of all countries. Its circulation is swift and not restricted."

"From Falaise!" exclaimed John, taking the despatch and tearing it open.

"Aye, from Falaise," repeated the Jester, casting a shrewd glance at Mauluc, who bent an evil eye upon him. "Perhaps though," he continued, as if to himself, "'tis but old news after all. But I heard as I rode that young Prince Arthur ——"

"Is dead," said John.

"Dead!" echoed Mauluc. "Your Grace

surprises me. From whom is this intelligence?"

"From Hubert," replied the King. "He writes me word —" then turning suddenly upon Gondibert, "Avoid the chamber, Sir Knave, or we shall crop those long ears of thine."

"Truly so," coincided the Jester: "but in order that those of my master may not be cropped also, I must beg you to peruse the despatch I likewise bring. By the same token, I swore an oath that if I hung for my pains, I would in person deliver it. The good Knight craves succour, my liege. His party are pent up, all that remain of them, in Chateau Trompillon, where they are surrounded by a host, and whence I have escaped to bring the tidings. The Daundelyonne dies, but yields not. He will yet manage to hold out till succour arrives, but it must be speedy to be of any avail."

"I have other and more pressing matter," replied John, waving his hand impatiently. "To-morrow we will take order for this."

"To-morrow the Knight of Daundelyonne

falls with the towers he garrisons," urged Gondibert. "He will starve his garrison, or cut his own windpipe ; but he will never either yield or be conquered. Your Highness's neglect will lose a bold and ready soldier."

"Hence, fool," said the King, "you have our answer."

"O monster!" muttered the Jester to himself, as he left the apartment. "Strong to execute evil, but blind to perceive even thine own good. Whoso serves thee is likely to reap a poor recompense."

"Our good and trusty Hubert," resumed John, so soon as the Jester had made his exit, "writes me word, here, that our beloved nephew deceased on Wednesday night, some three hours after your departure. He further adds, that he has taken order for the funeral, and that he has publicly announced the event. This is somewhat melancholy intelligence, Sir Knight. We trust it will not be rumoured that through any orders we have given, such an event can have occurred."

If anything could by possibility turn the

hearts of the vile instruments of remorseless power towards the path of rectitude, it would surely be the precarious nature of the reward they are likely to receive. Of all the monarchs who ever made use of men's unscrupulous consciences, John was perhaps one of the most vile. He felt no sort of shame or remorse in shaking himself clear of his instruments, the instant he had used them, if he no longer needed their services; and outfacing them in a moment, would consign them to death rather than openly shield them by his countenance and support, or aid their escape from justice.—Sinking ripe, he put his foot upon their heads.

Mauluc had many instances in his memory to remind him of this, but he was a deep and scheming villain, and trusted to his own craft and cunning to attain his ends, notwithstanding the dangerous nature of the master he served. It was like a game of chance, in which both players were false and hollow as the dice they threw.

“Your Grace's instructions were most clear,” said Mauluc, “both to Sir Raoul de Braban

and myself. That the youth has sunk under the trial to which we were therein ordered to submit him, (although but in part performed,) I can easily believe. Should such be the case—and the Duke of Brittany be really dead—I hold myself not responsible for the event, since I can produce the warrant your Highness placed in my hands. I am, however, inclined to look upon the event, if really true, as most fortunate. The youth was before evidently sinking from the grief and chagrin of his confinement ; and it will, doubtless, be supposed that he hath died from those causes. So die all your Highness's troubles."

"I know not that," said John, gloomily. "I learn further from Hubert, that the Bretons are enraged beyond measure, and that he is greatly threatened by the revolted Barons. In fact, that all around him is in the most dire confusion ; whilst men scruple not to say openly, that Arthur hath met with foul play."

The fellowship of villany held the pair long over their cups ; and in the discussion of much

wine and more evil, the dark hours of night wore on. Fresh plots were culled and proposed for the morrow. But the morrow brought its own buds forth ; and the schemes of the poor compounded clay were as nought.

CHAPTER X.

AN ESCAPE.

O noble fool!

A worthy fool!—Motley's the only wear.

SHAKESPERE.

It will doubtless be easily surmised by our readers that the Warden of Falaise, in pursuance of the scheme he had conceived, and in the hope of saving the Prince, had spread a report of his death, and had also attempted the somewhat hazardous project of deceiving, in so imminent a matter, the dangerous John.

It was, indeed, a perilous essay, and even if successful for a time, could hardly fail of involving himself eventually in the ruin from which he wished to preserve his charge. He was playing with the envenomed teeth of the tiger, and well did he know the risk he ran.

The gentle Hubert, however, as his whole course of life has shown, possessed as fair a mind as his heart was dauntless. He would fain have saved the broken-hearted Prince, at least for some time, in the hope that matters might have been arranged between the uncle and nephew. Such, however, was not to be the case.

The report of Arthur's death, in the meantime, enraged the Bretons to so great a degree, that they vowed a deep revenge for what they scrupled not to designate as his murder. The revolted Barons also called upon heaven and earth to aid them in their rebellion, and the firebrands of war, which before might be said but to have smouldered, and sent forth only an occasional spark, now seemed kindling into a flame which no man would have the power to extinguish.

Under these circumstances, the unstable King (who affected to blame the thing he secretly rejoiced at,) wrote an intemperate letter to Hubert, even rebuking him for obeying the instructions he had himself transmitted

by his myrmidons, to the effect that for a space he should give up the entire charge of the Prince into their hands.

It was on the receipt of this letter that Hubert thought it prudent to reveal the secret; and immediately inform the world that the Duke of Brittany was still alive. John was on the march from Mirabeau when he received this news, which fell upon his ears like a clap of thunder.

The satisfaction it evidently gave to the different nobles around was also wormwood to him, and for the first few moments, after halting to peruse the despatch which announced the tidings, he sat upon his steed like one bewildered. At length, he gave the word to the knights and gentlemen in his immediate vicinity to move forwards, and then, as was his usual custom when out of sorts, associated himself with those of baser degree, who were commonly the companions of his darker councils.

The result of the deliberations he held was an immediate order for the main part of his

power to move forwards towards Rouen, whither he also directed the young Duke of Brittany to be instantly conveyed under strong escort.

This order was a heavy blow to Hubert. Under the circumstances in which he had lived with his prisoner, during the time he had feigned the Prince's death, the youth had necessarily become even more endeared to him. The amiability and fortitude of the unhappy captive had so won upon the heart of his keeper, during the short period they had been thrown so closely together, that it was like the parting of father and son. Well did Hubert guess the probable fate of the young Duke; and all the horrible anticipations of the former diabolical attempt were now again presented to his mind with sterner force.

John had, however, this time put it out of his power to disobey. The force he had sent to Falaise as escort to the Prince precluded all possibility of evading or tampering with the order. Hubert also found himself superseded in the wardenship of the castle of Falaise, and commissioned, together with Lupiciare,

one of his Brabançons, to advance to the relief of the castle of Passelieu, a small fortress which was besieged by a party of the enraged Bretons.

In the extremity of grief to which Hubert was reduced by these measures, he might have been led to the commission of some act of desperation, which, without in the least aiding the cause of his unfortunate charge, would have involved him in deep disgrace with his royal master; but, in the midst of his trouble and perplexity, it happened, luckily for him, that an old acquaintance unexpectedly arrived at Falaise. This was no other than Gondibert, the jester of Daundelyonne, who, covered with dust and blood, and stained with the variation of each soil betwixt Mirabeau and Falaise, suddenly presented himself.

Between the Jester and Hubert there had for many years existed a strict friendship. All the folly of the motley coat was thrown aside when they held converse together; and the times' abuse, the cares of the state, and matters

of deep import were commonly and unreservedly discussed by them.

Many a time in former days, when the shadows of the closing day fell upon tower and turret, upon wood and fell, had the Jester sat with Hubert de Burgh in his apartment in the keep of Dover Castle, (that fortress where the Warden was, in the after-part of John's reign, to play so noble a part,) and canvassed matters of a deep and dangerous character; lamenting the implacability of temper of the King, his want of principle in his political conduct, his bad passions, and his hollow heart.

In fact, as the reader must have surmised by this time, the Jester Gondibert was in reality no fool. He was certainly playing a part on the stage for the nonce, and whether, for some end only known to himself and especial friends, he had assumed the coxcomb to carry out his own private views, or whether merely to amuse the passing hour, we cannot at this stage of proceedings stay to consider. But that he was a wise, brave, and noble-hearted man, and

both a sincere friend and bitter enemy when he felt the extremes of love and hate,—of this we have reason to be satisfied.

In the present instance the Jester displayed considerable influence even over the iron Hubert,—his presence proving like oil upon the troubled sea of the Warden's spirit.

“Go, my friend,” he said, laying his hand upon Hubert's shoulder, after perusing the fatal order from the King, “believe me, you are powerless in this. We cannot hold the strong hand of power. The reasons I have possessed you with will make me a spy upon what is going on at Rouen, and possibly I may circumvent the villany of this Mauluc. If not, the hand of Heaven is not to be restrained by a weak and debile minister. Go, my friend,” he continued, “put your foot in the stirrup, shake your lance in air, and forget in action the sorrows of the world. I will remain beside the unfeeling John, who has taken a fancy to my harsh truths of late, and perhaps I may keep evil councillors from his board. The youth I named to you before is

also in jeopardy. Him likewise I must make an effort to rescue from durance, and in aiding one I may serve both. Away then, and teach thy necessity to reason with thy grief; but trifle no more with dangerous majesty."

In order to pursue the somewhat twisted and ravelled skein of our story, we must explain to our readers that when Gondibert left the royal presence, after making his unsuccessful application for relief to be immediately sent to his master, he resolved to seek out one or two of the Knight of Daundelyonne's private friends, who he knew, on being made acquainted with his extremity, would organize a little expedition on their own account, and giving their banners to the wind, advance to the Knight's relief. Under this conviction he sought out the gallant Earl of Salisbury, showed him the necessity of the case, and entreated instant help.

The good Earl was by no means behind-hand in granting the favour. The Daundelyonne was his friend and brother-in-arms; one whom he esteemed in those stirring times

as beyond price: a man of strict truth and high integrity; a true knight, and brave as the steel he wore. The stout Earl and his followers were, indeed, somewhat disgusted at the lukewarmness of John in this matter; and taking it up as a personal cause, in ten minutes after hearing of the extremity of his friend, his clarions sounded to horse, his followers mustered; and in ten minutes more, the stout Earl, accompanied by Sir John Passelieu, Ralph de Fauconier, Geoffrey de Lucy, and their several trains, were in full march towards Trompilion.

Whilst the good Gondibert negotiated this matter, he learned amongst the numerous friends he possessed at court, of the flight of the Lady Bertha; and upon the heels of that intelligence came a whole farrago of impertinence and scandal, in the shape of a garbled account of the apprehension, imprisonment, and intended execution of her minion, the favoured page.

Gondibert, covered with the dust and soil of more than one fray, and many miles of

travel, his motley wear concealed by a sort of demi-suit, his long ears compressed under an iron casque, and his lathen rapier exchanged for a ponderous blade, was solacing himself with a pasty and flagon, when this news was retailed to him.

He stopped the progress of his meal as the story was related, and rose from the heavy oaken chair he was seated in,—

“Stay, friend,” he said to the person who was hurrying on in all the delight of a news-bearer; “I pr’ythee tell thy story like a man of this world, and take time to utter thy words distinctly. If all this be true that I have already heard, my duty lies in these parts, and I need neither to hurry my supper here, nor speed my way hence, as I intended.”

“Such is in sooth the fact,” returned Wyvil Trencher. “The King’s attendant, De Bossu, would have had the job of putting this youth to his purgation, but I suppose you know that he hath met with a misfortune, and been run through the body by William de la Bray.”

“All I know,” said the Jester, “is, that I

know nothing. How, good Wyvil Trencher, can I know news of the court here, when I have been shut up in Trompilion with a scum of Bretons, ready to eat me up alive ? So the burley De Bossu hath met his reward, hath he ? I pray thee, since such is the case, unhook my casque, and let my ears drink thy tidings, and my galled head gain a respite whilst I feed. Thou hast already possessed me with strange intelligence ; I pr'ythee finish thy story whilst I proceed with my supper."

" I had ere this finished it," said Wyvil, "hadst thou not interrupted me, Gondibert. Methinks thou art one of those who had rather talk than listen, let who would be the speaker."

" Not at meals, good Wyvil, not at meals," replied the Jester, "especially when one so wise as thou relatest. I pr'ythee hand me up that dish of stewed collops from the hearth, and finish thy story. So the knave, De Bossu, hath been wounded by De la Bray ?"

" He hath," said Wyvil.

“What were the circumstances?” inquired the Jester.

“Nay,” returned Wyvil, “you must be close in the matter, for none of us care to know too much of the transactions of De Bossu. De la Bray, it appears, suspected the Bravo of dishonesty what time he accompanied him on the road to Falaise, and to rid himself of his company turned and ordered him back. De Bossu urged the King’s instructions to attend upon him on the journey, upon which De la Bray was wroth, and telling De Bossu that he was but a common cut-throat, whose trade he knew was murder, turned and attacked the Bravo, and, after a rapid and desperate conflict, ran him through, and afterwards escaped to England.”

“Truly, these are stirring times we live in, Wyvil,” said the Jester; “men change service as the vane turns to the blast. I would I were safe ensconced in my snug berth beside the hearth at Daundelyonne. What say’st thou, eh?”

“I would it were no worse,” answered the attendant; “but there are many of us here will never look upon the white cliffs of Kent again, good Gondibert. Whether you and I shall do so, Heaven only knows.”

“Tush, man,” said Gondibert, “thou art growing fearful in thine old age. Mercy on us! how the wind sounds to-night. Come, draw thy stool nearer the hearth and fill another cup for the nonce. I have a favour to ask: I want thee to get me an interview with this condemned minstrel to-night.”

“Nay, Gondibert,” said Wyvil, “bethink ye now, would you draw my neck into the halter? Besides, I know not how I can aid you in the matter.”

“Easily,” said Gondibert. “Thou possessest the key to most men’s hearts. Thou art the warden of the wine-cellar. Invite me the jailor of the condemned cells, to taste of thy cup here, and ply him well.”

“And then?” said Wyvil.

“And then I will contrive to be placed on sentry over the prison. Look ye, I have but

to polish up my harness and close my visor, and lo! I am a man-at-arms for the nonce."

"And so should I be certain of being scourged with iron rods for my share in whatever it might please you in your vagaries to execute," remarked Wyvil with a shrug. "Marry, who would be the fool then, think ye?"

"You yourself," returned the Jester, "if you should find it jump with your wisdom to betray your part in the transaction. But come, I demand this service of thee, good master Wyvil, and by those defalcations thou wottest of, but which I do not mean to betray, I advise you to aid me in this business. Remember, good friend, a fool is often as dangerous to deal with as a knave, and always more incorrigible."

It was some two hours after this conference that the strong door of the cell in which the minstrel was confined was slowly opened, and the next moment the dark figure of a man-at-arms, holding a lamp in his hand, stood before him. The youth was seated upon the damp straw which had served for the couch of more

than one precedent captive. When the stranger entered, and as he started to his feet, the heavy chains which manacled his legs showed the care with which he had been secured.

The stranger raised the lamp at arm's length, and gazed with some little surprise. It would seem by his puzzled look that this was not exactly the person he expected to find entombed in the vaults he had sought out. After a few moments he was about to approach nearer to the prisoner, but the minstrel bade him stand off.

"Beware, fellow," he said, "I am chained and unarmed. Thou may'st hew me down, as they poll an ox, but beware my gripe. If thy coward master hath sent thee hither to end me in my cell, thou shalt find the task, at least, no easy one."

"St. Radegonde of Poitiers!" exclaimed Gondibert, "but this is strange. Calm yourself, good youth; I come to do you service. I pray thee be assured. Nay, then, I relinquish my weapon—look: I place it against the wall here."

“For what purpose hast thou visited my cell?” inquired the Minstrel. “I know thee not. I wish not for thy company. The few hours I have to tarry on earth I would fain pass in contemplation and prayer.”

“Strange,” said the Jester to himself, as he regarded the prisoner steadfastly, “that I should have spent two years in Asia and ten in hunting Europe over to find this boy, and that I should now hit upon him so many feet under ground! I pray thee, good youth, answer my question briefly; thou wast once of Chinon, in Touraine?”

“Who and what art thou who askest such a question?” replied the Minstrel. “Lift thy beaver that I may know thee.”

“In good time,” added the Jester; “meanwhile, answer me. Thy name is Clothaire, surnamed Le Hardi: am I right?”

“Such is the name I have gone by in many countries,” answered the Minstrel in some surprise.

“And thou hast the mark of the cross upon thy right arm?”

“In the name of the Virgin, tell me,—who and what art thou?” inquired the Minstrel anxiously. “Methinks I recognise the tone of one I have long thought dead.”

“I am one who means nothing but good to thee,” returned Gondibert. “Here, take this file and get rid of the manacles which confine thy legs. Time flies apace, and, if thou art to escape a cruel death, thou must put many miles betwixt thyself and Falaise ere the time comes for relief of guard.”

The Minstrel sprang from the corner of his cell, and where he had drawn himself like the tiger ready to fight to the last gasp, and seizing the file commenced cutting through the rings by which one of his ancles was confined, whilst the Jester, with a similar instrument, essayed the other leg.

“O, joy!” cried the youth, springing up, “I feel already at liberty and in the open world once more.”

“It is only when we have been sick almost to death,” observed Gondibert, quietly, “that we feel the blessing of returning health.

Moderate your transports, good Clothaire, lest the guard without hear them, in which case you will quickly relapse. Be silent, and follow."

The Jester now led his charge through a long and dismal souterrain, which seemed to run under the whole extent of the fortress. In the centre of it they came to a part where the roof was arched and beautifully carved. Here it was intersected by another passage of similar extent, which led on either hand to dungeons like the one they had left. They were now in the lowermost vaults of the castle,—the condemned cells of Mirabeau,—where the unhappy captive, when once immured, was frequently either utterly forgotten in the busy world above, or perhaps purposely left to expiate his alleged crimes by starvation.

At the extremity of this passage they once more found themselves amongst a cluster of dungeons. The Jester entered one of them, and descending a flight of steps, found himself opposite a sally-port which led into the dry ditch of the castle. In this dark and dismal

drain, for it appeared no better, the Jester paused, and laid his hand upon his companion.

“ You feel the pure air of heaven upon your cheek ?” he asked.

“ I do,” returned the youth ; “ it breathes of warmth and life ; we have exchanged it for the cold death-like chill of the vaults.”

“ We are now near the entrance,” said the Jester ; “ be silent as death, and remain here, whilst I go forward to reconnoitre.”

The minstrel was now left alone in the damp cold passage which led to the sally-port, and in total darkness, for Gondibert had extinguished his lamp as soon as they had entered the narrower passage. If his heart had been capable of fear, he might have felt some tremors now, for the situation was not an enviable one, since to return would have been difficult, and to go forward without his guide would have led to capture. His conductor, however, returned, after about a quarter of an hour's absence.

“ I have filed through the lock of the iron grating,” he observed, “ which admits us to the ditch of the inner ballium ; there is, however,

still something to be done. You must ensconce yourself in my harness, in order to hide your own habiliments, or we shall scarce pass muster."

So saying, Gondibert proceeded to divest himself of the shirt of linked mail and the helmet which covered his motley suit, and the youth as quickly assumed them.

"And how will you yourself pass?" inquired Clothaire, as he fitted the casque upon his head, and closed the visor. "How will you pass, without disguise of some sort?"

"I require none," replied Gondibert; "you forget, the motley suit is seldom questioned. We gentry have liberty like the wind, to go and come as we list. The sentinel on the slope must, however, be dealt with, or you will be arrested. Whilst I parley, you must steal upon him."

"I cannot strike a man at advantage," replied the youth, promptly; "not even for the blessing of recovered liberty and life will I so dishonour myself."

"To attack him openly," said Gondibert,

“would bring the whole swarm upon us from the barbican, like bees from a hive. I admire your scruples, but they are a stumbling-block to your advancement just now. What’s to be done?”

“I will advance upon the guard, and cut him down if he opposes me,” said the Minstrel.

“It would lead to ruin,” returned the Jester; “but, soft! what sparkles here in the ray of light from the grating?”

“By heaven! it is the King’s signet,” said Clothaire, “which has been forgotten upon my finger up to this hour.”

“Enough!” said Gondibert, “follow quickly, for we have already delayed too long. Yet stay,” he resumed, “hearken to yonder sound. By St. Paul! they have discovered our flight. Thou wilt yet suffer the punishment of a satirical poet, and I shall be put to death for a faithless man-at-arms. In God’s name, hasten onwards; we have some minutes the start of them, if they take the right-hand turning; more, if they hold on along the main passage.”

With this, the Jester hurried on, followed by

the youth, and passing into the ditch, ascended the slope on the other side.

“Stand!” said the sentinel, bringing down his partisan.

“Is that necessary, friend?” asked Gondibert coolly; “we are upon the King’s service, and would fain be moving onwards, with your permission.”

“Who, and what are you?” inquired the sentinel.

“Perhaps, friend, you’ll do us the favour to examine this bauble,” replied Gondibert; “in the meantime—Ah! I thought so!—always grant graciously what you cannot refuse safely. God shield thee, soldier, and send thee speedy relief, this cold night. Adieu!”

The Jester now hurried on, and his companion followed quickly at his heels. By virtue of the ring, they also passed the barrier, and eventually succeeded in gaining the streets of the town. Here they held a short and hasty conference together, ere they separated.

“The times are wild,” remarked Gondibert; “and he who can see further than his nose,

may spy a dire scene of confusion at hand. Put the wide waters between thyself and this land as fast as possible. We are all for England, anon, depend on't, or we shall be scourged hence, as we are progressing now. Meanwhile, there is no time for parley ; remember what I have advised, and meet me, at all events, this day three months."

"There hath been foul and infamous wrong done to the noble Lady of Daundelyonne," said Clothaire ; "and until I have discovered the ravisher who hath carried her off, and have succeeded in setting her at liberty, I will not leave this land."

"Nay, then," said Gondibert, shrugging his shoulders, "if it must be, be it so. I give up my intent of seeking out the mystery of Bertha Daundelyonne's flight, and will return towards Falaise. Meanwhile, remember what I before hinted to thee of my suspicions of Mauluc and the Brabançon. I overheard some part of a scheme which the event seems to fasten upon that pair of worthies. Turn thy horse's head, therefore, towards Brittany ; whilst I, mean-

while, have an eye upon the other caitiff at Falaise. Farewell! clear the city walls at day-break, and God speed thee. If the sun rise upon thee within Mirabeau, thy life is forfeit."

CHAPTER XI.

THE OUTLAWS' CAVERN.

But love, first learned in a lady's eye,
Lives not alone immured in the brain;
But with the motion of all elements,
Courses as swift as thought in every power;
And gives to every power a double power,
Above their functions and their offices.
It adds a precious seeing to the eye;
A lover's eyes will gaze an eagle blind;
A lover's ear will hear the lowest sound.

* * * * *

For valour, is not love a Hercules,
Still climbing trees in the Hesperides,
Subtle as Sphinx, as sweet and musical
As bright Apollo's lute, strung with his hair?

SHAKESPERE.

WE must now cast a backward glance to the Lord of Folkstone and his companion in the outlaw's cavern, and whom we left somewhat startled by the apparition of an armed spy upon their secret conference. The stranger

advanced towards the lovers so soon as he saw he had been observed. He stood for a few moments gazing upon the lady through the bars of his helmet ; and as the flame of the fire shone upon his steel harness and ponderous arms, he seemed a form of giant height.

After regarding her for a short time with a searching and steady gaze, whilst the young noble, his hand upon his weapon, stood in act to step to her aid, the stranger, slowly turning his gaze from her, as if unwilling to leave the contemplation of so much beauty, addressed the Knight.

“Sir Knight,” he said, “I have been an unwilling witness of some part of your conference with this lady, by which I have penetrated the secret of her disguise, and the cheat you have both passed upon me. ’Tis lucky I came hither unexpected and unattended. Our laws are strict, nor dare I infringe them by showing the slightest partiality. By such laws, a woman discovered, concealed or disguised in our fastness, becomes the victim of the band ; and yonder dark stream, whose roar

has hindered you from hearing my approach, is the destined place of punishment for such offender."

As the stranger finished speaking, he lifted the visor of his helmet, and discovered a countenance of considerable masculine beauty, although it was completely overgrown with the curly beard and moustache, which covered the lower portion of his countenance; the lofty height, herculean proportions, and magnificent carriage of the man forming a perfect model of a rugged warrior of an early age.

There was nothing rude or ruffianly in his deportment; and in his movement, voice, and gesture, it appeared that the ponderous and somewhat rusted suit in which he was equipped, and the shield which hung around his neck, with no symbol upon its dented surface to show the world he was a gentleman, made a false report of the wearer.

The Lord of Folkstone, at the words of the bandit, unsheathed his weapon like lightning; whilst the lady, who shuddered at the dread-

ful fate with which she was threatened, clung to his side for protection.

Although the young Knight was but partially recovered from his wounds, and consequently lacked his wonted strength and vigour, his skill in arms would be likely to avail him much against an unknightly antagonist, and who, from early youth, had not been trained to any sort of weapon.

“Ruffian,” he said, “whose threats towards a woman within the shelter of your refuge are cowardly as base, I will slay thee like the commonest felon, if thou offerest but the show of violence towards her.”

The robber smiled.

“It is ill coming between the lover and her he loves,” he quietly remarked: “that you will do your devoir in the lady’s behalf I nothing doubt, Sir Knight, but your efforts would be vain. In half an hour great part of my band will arrive here ; and, meanwhile, you are in no condition for a champion, albeit love would doubtless nerve your arm.”

“Nay,” said the girl, advancing, and throwing herself at the feet of the robber; “wherefore should there be strife between us? Men speak thee fair, good Guischarde. Let there be peace between this Knight and thee. Permit the young Lord of Folkstone to depart. We but awaited your return to thank you for the hospitable shelter you have so long afforded us.”

The bandit again gazed upon her with marked admiration, and then raised her from the ground.

“Be it so, fair maiden,” he said; “the young Knight is at liberty to depart from us; but pardon me if I add, that you can scarce go with him.”

“By heaven!” exclaimed the youth, “I will consent to be entombed in this cavern till the last trumpet call me to upper air, ere I leave it unaccompanied by her I love.”

“Be content, Sir Knight,” returned the outlaw; “the lady shall not undergo the danger of a longer residence amongst us than will suffice for me to extricate her with safety

from so perilous a situation. With morning's dawn she also shall seek another and a safer refuge; but it will be in my company, and under my escort."

"Nay, then," exclaimed the Lord of Folkstone, "'tis idle to waste more words. Let go, ruffian, thy hold upon the lady's arm, or I will assail thee where thou standest, and slay thee, though backed by all thy band."

The robber again smiled, as he drew back a pace, and raised his hand.

"'Twould avail thee not to do so," he said. "On the contrary, you would but lose the chance of again beholding the light of heaven. Without mine own, or the guidance of one of my people, no power could teach thee the secret of this cavern. Listen, Sir Knight," he continued, "and trust to an outlaw's word. I swear to thee upon the cross of my weapon, that this lady's honour and safety shall be as dear to me as to thyself. There is imminent danger every moment she remains here. 'Tis now too late to think of leaving the cavern till the return of my people, as the attempt would

bring upon us suspicion and discovery; but, on their arrival, I will take an opportunity of guiding you both in safety to the upper world. The lady shall then make choice between us, as to which is to protect her from further danger.

“I scorn,” he continued, addressing the sometime page, “to take any unfair advantage of one whom circumstances have placed in my power. I am an outlaw, whose profession is rapine and violence, but I have still some nurture, some remaining remembrance of the better feelings of a better trade. Will it be asking too much to crave a few words with you ere my band returns? Your lover, provided he be out of ear-shot of our conference, may remain to see I offer no rudeness towards you.”

The girl, with the frankness of her nature, gave her hand to the robber, and they stepped a few paces from the spot where the Knight stood.

“I have small time for conference,” said the robber earnestly; “time presses, and my band will be here anon. Meanwhile, I have already

told thee I have overheard a portion of your conference with yonder Knight, and the history you gave him of your early life. From the first moment I saw you, your features struck me as bearing resemblance to one I knew in former years. Thou hast a mark upon thy shoulder; thou hast,—I know I cannot be mistaken. Thou art she whom Gondibert hath long watched over, and whom he helped to save, when the sorceress of Nivelles was killed in Kent.”

“I am,” said the girl; “but, O Heaven! tell me truly, art thou then the parent whom Gondibert has darkly hinted at? Have I so long panted to trace my parentage to some honourable source, and do I now find my father in a common robber, condemned to dive into the bowels of the earth in order to avoid the hangman’s cord?”

“You do, maiden,” returned the outlaw, “and it remains with thee to choose whether you follow the bright fortunes of yonder gallant knight, or of him who gave thee being. I am a deeply injured man, but, guiltless of

crime, have been driven to embrace the life in which you behold me engaged."

The young noble, who, in courtesy to his robber-host, had withdrawn a few paces whilst he held conference with the girl, stood with arms folded in the gloom of the cavern, keenly watching the event of a conversation he both hoped and supposed might lead to the freedom of himself and her he loved. As he kept a steady eye upon the tall form of the robber, he held himself in readiness at any moment to spring to her assistance on the slightest symptom of treachery or offered rudeness.

Their situation he knew was one of great difficulty and peril. They were in the den of the lion, in his power, and almost helpless. For himself he entertained comparatively little apprehension or care; but for one so exquisitely beautiful to be thus at the mercy of a bravo's sense of courtesy and chivalrous feeling, was a perilous chance indeed.

As the Knight watched with jealous eye the conversation of the pair, his fears for the

safety of the lady, gradually gave place to surprise, jealousy, indignation, and scorn.

At first he felt surprised at the increasing animation and interest with which the conversation was carried on; and, as the dialogue proceeded, and the speakers removed further from the place where he himself had taken up his stand, the green-eyed monster whispered a thousand evil suggestions in his ear.

The Robber-captain was a splendid figure of a man; and as he seemed to plead his suit, it appeared to the young noble that the lady's manner was anything but repelling. Then came divers reflections upon her former errant life; brought up and nurtured amidst the followers of a camp, even according to her own account; spending her infancy and receiving her education amidst the very scum of society—and he began to suspect—Heaven help him!—that with all her plausibility, eloquence, and seeming innocence, his fair attendant was little better than she should be. A little deceitful gipsy, with a winning tongue, and a wicked heart.

His jealousy and surprise, however, were quickly mixed up with no slight degree of anger and scorn, and he stood perfectly aghast, when he beheld this still interesting and beautiful creature absolutely throw herself into the robber's arms, and then kneel at his feet.

There was, however, small time to comment upon the matter, as almost ere the chief had raised the lady, and seemed about to lead her to the spot where the young noble stood, the shrill blast of a bugle sounded from the dark abyss beyond the stream, a confused hubbub, as of a large party advancing, was heard, and the next moment, the rude figures of the banditti, uproarious in their mirth, came bounding into the cavern.

The Robber-chief was as good as his word. Amidst the scene of riotous hilarity, and during the feast and revel which succeeded the entrance of his band, he took an opportunity of stealing from his place at the head of the board. Then, desiring the seeming page, whom he had kept in close attendance upon

himself—to warn the Knight to follow, he led them along a narrow passage towards that part of the subterranean stream where the boat was moored. Silently and stealthily they embarked, and the chief then instructed the young noble to feel for an oar in the prow of the craft, and pull silently, whilst he himself seized upon its fellow, and together they rowed themselves and their fair charge across the stream.

Their attempt was fraught with danger, as it was not the custom amongst the fraternity, to dismiss their captives, but by general consent of the whole band; an ordeal the captain did not think fit to put his prisoners through. And in the event of their absence being noted, and the suspicions of the band once aroused, even his own position as captain would not have saved them from destruction. Their progress also, in the dark labyrinth, was by no means easy; for as it was the invariable custom of the banditti to extinguish the light by which they had guided themselves, so soon as they had gained the stream, the Chief had to trust to his knowledge of the different local-

ities in utter darkness—a task he had never before undertaken. Their movements were therefore slow and perilous. Sometimes they traversed the shelving and rocky side of the cavern, which, scarcely wide enough for a precarious footing, was rendered more dangerous by the sound and roar of the dark stream deep below their feet. It was indeed like travelling the Valley of the shadow of Death. The Robber with the hand of the lady clasped in his own, led the way, and the young Knight followed, clad in the chain harness he now wore for the first time since he had received his wound.

After proceeding for some time along this dangerous pathway, they came to a vast chamber, as was apparent from the echo of their own footsteps, and their conductor's slightest whisper. When a certain number of paces had been gained, which the robber carefully counted, they paused for a few moments.

As they did so, the sound of the distant revellers was faintly but plainly to be distin-

guished. They were trolling forth a boisterous glee over their flagons.

The Captain drew a long breath, as he caught the sounds, which assured him all was so far propitious; and whilst they paused, he appeared to be diligently searching for some object on the rocky surface of the cave.

For some time his search was fruitless, and he seemed at fault. Again he went to work, and took a wider range, whilst his companions, in some little anxiety, awaited the event.

At length, he again left them in his search, and the Knight stepped after him to inquire the meaning of the delay.

The Robber stopped and turned. "On your life," he said "move not from the spot on which you stand. Our hope of egress and escape is over if you change your position in this vast hall. I have failed in finding the line which affords us the right clue from this part of the cave. The opposite side yonder is like a honey-comb, but by one only of its narrow openings can we hope to find the entrance to liberty."

Silently and carefully the Knight returned to the side of the lady. Their position was a fearful one, and spite of the angry feelings with which he now regarded her, he felt it his duty to endeavour to reassure and comfort her.

Almost unconsciously he found he had possession of her diminutive hand in his own iron gauntlet. 'Twas a rude prison for so soft and delicate a captive. No word had passed between them since the *éclaircissement* between herself and the robber-chief. The Knight felt, however, unable to resist the impulse, and carried the snowy offering to his lips.

The situation, indeed, was not without its charm. The head of the lady drooped upon the Knight's shoulder. He felt that she was sinking to the ground; and as his arm encircled her waist, and he laid her gently upon the floor of the cavern, he discovered that she had fainted. The next moment, as he was about to rise from his kneeling posture, in order to call the Captain to her aid, on putting

his hand to the ground he clutched a small cord: the secret clue of the cavern.

To call cautiously to the Captain was the work of a moment. A few whispered words informed him that, through fear and anxiety, their charge had fainted. The Robber stooped, and seizing her in his arms, gave the clue to the Knight, and they quickly gained the narrow passage which led them to the mouth of the cavern.

The mouth of this curious refuge was so artfully concealed by nature that, except to the banditti themselves, and a few of the peasantry of the neighbourhood, who participated in the secret and were in the interest of the band, it was quite unknown. It was accessible by a trap-door situate in the bottom of a deep hollow, and completely shrouded and environed by thick and tangled bushes, in themselves a perfect maze to the uninitiated.

“ A subtle pit,
Whose mouth was covered with rude-growing briars.”

On gaining the interior, and after an easy

descent of some dozen wide steps from the trap, was a large chamber in which the geologists of the present day would have found an endless source of contemplation and delight, for in its sandy recesses were to be seen the skeletons of numerous beasts of prey and their victims of a former world. Here the bones of the hyena were mingled with the lesser remains of the fox, the wolf, and other animals. It was in this chamber that the robbers kept what few steeds they were possessed of, and which were stabled there for the very sufficient reason, that, in consequence of the narrowness of the passage leading to the further recesses of the cavern, it was impossible for aught larger than a human being to traverse its windings. Here also were kept the various disguises in use, and a guard, consisting of four of the band, was always on duty at this part.

The appearance of the Captain and his companions excited no surprise in the men stationed there, for they naturally supposed that

his departure from the cavern must have been known to their comrades. The Bandit instantly gave orders that three of the horses should be got in readiness, and directed a scout to indue himself in one of the disguises kept in readiness for the purpose, and reconnoitre the vicinity of their hiding-place ere he himself and his companions emerged. That done, the horses were led up the ascent and thence into the bottom of the hollow, where the party mounted, and the Captain leading the way up by a narrow path amongst the thick bushes, in a few minutes they were as travellers in the wood.

After so long a sojourn in the bowels of the earth, even the gloom of the thick forest around seemed a heaven of light and freedom to the maiden and the young Knight. It was broad day when they emerged, and the sylvan scene softened in the subdued light, the wood looking endless on every side, with here and there a flash of sunlight in the distance, struggling amidst the massive foliage, and gigantic

stems of the trees, presented a delicious picture to their eyes.

“ Their horses’ hoof-tread seemed too rude,
So stilly was the solitude.”

The events of the last few hours had so completely taken the Knight by surprise that he felt somewhat constrained in the company of his youthful fellow-traveller. Towards the robber-chieftain—whose noble figure and gallant appearance, as he now beheld him mounted upon a goodly steed, he could not but admire—he began to feel an increasing aversion; more especially when he found that the chief appeared to assume a sort of right to be the exclusive protector of her he himself still regarded with feelings of love. Willingly, as he observed the continuance of their somewhat mysterious intimacy, could he have wheeled his steed, and couching lance have commanded him either to leave the girl to the exclusive guidance of himself, or stand the shock of his encounter. But courtesy towards one to whom he was already indebted, both on

the score of hospitality and subsequent service, held him silent.

The safe-conduct of the chief was likewise still necessary to their extrication from the labyrinths of the forest, since it became apparent, that unaided by his presence and escort, they might haply have been again captured by outlying parties of his company. In their progress through the forest this became more evident, as the Knight could hardly fail of observing that several men emerged from the thick underwood on either side the track they were pursuing, but, on a signal from their conductor, instantly dived into the covert and vanished.

At length they came to a more open space, in the midst of which an enormous oak threw its mossed boughs over a delicious carpet of greensward; and here the robber drew bridle, and halting, addressed himself to the Knight.

“Here, my Lord,” he said, “we must separate. Our paths to-day, as through life, run in different directions. You are now safe from

all interference from those members of my band who occupy the forest, and a few hours' ride will take you to the English camp."

"In my own person, and in the name of the faithful friend whose care and attention has saved me from death," answered the Knight, "I thank thee, Sir Outlaw; and should fate ever make it necessary for thee to seek a friend, be assured I will use my utmost endeavours to serve thee."

As the Knight made his adieux to the robber, he spurred his steed to the lady's side, and took her bridle-rein in his hand to lead her onwards in her journey. But the outlaw also placed his hand upon her palfrey's rein.

"Pardon me, Sir Knight," he said; "the lady remains under my charge."

"How," exclaimed the other, at once commencing the quarrel he was not sorry to find, and unsheathing his weapon, "thou scarce wouldst have the hardihood to attempt detaining this lady against her will?"

The robber smiled as he gazed upon the excited champion.

“Were I to do so,” he remarked, “believe me I have sufficient power in my own domain here to make good that attempt. But I scorn putting restraint upon a fair lady’s slightest wish. Put up your sword, Sir Knight, and ask herself which she chooses for her future guardian,—the proud Norman noble or the degraded outlaw of the forest.”

The maiden covered her face with her hands, and then, as her tears fell fast, she addressed herself to the robber-chief.

“We cannot part so,” she said; “you will suffer me to tell him why I am fain to choose thus?”

“It may not be,” returned the Robber, aside; “my story cannot be told without drawing down danger upon us both. Believe me, I know these Norman nobles better than thou dost.—’Tis better as it is.”

“Farewell, then, Sir Knight,” she said, turning to Lord Folkstone, whilst tears streamed down her face; “you will sometimes remember your poor attendant.”

The Knight took her proffered hand.

“It is not—it cannot be possible,” he said, “that you willingly place yourself under the protection of this rude man. Speak but the word, and in one instant I will free you from his power.”

“Such word,” said the weeping maiden, “must be never spoken by me. Freely and with my own consent I choose him for my guardian.”

The Knight waited to hear no more. He turned his steed, and dashing the spurs into his flanks galloped along the road the outlaw had pointed out as leading to the English camp.

CHAPTER XII.

For I must talk of murder,
Acts black as night, abominable deeds,
Complots of mischief, treason, villanies,
Ruthful to hear, yet piteously performed.

SHAKESPERE.

WE must now again ask our readers to accompany us to the dungeon of the unhappy Arthur, in order that we may behold him sunk into a more hopeless state of misery than he had even before experienced.

He was alone; deep in the vaults of the castle of Rouen. His very whereabouts was unknown save to his relentless uncle and the vile Mauluc. The iron had entered deeply into his soul. Only the clanking stride of his stern jailor once in the twenty-four hours proclaimed to him that he still had communication with the world above. Its light, its

clear air, the seasons' difference, nay, almost the power of distinguishing night from day, were gone; whilst above the vault in which he was confined, the feast, the revel, and the brilliant ball were held.

The King once more feasted his nobles in the castle-hall. The tables groaned with viands, and the sparkling wine passed swiftly amidst the hum of converse; and the shout, the laugh, and the merry jest were heard above the clang and clatter of the feast. The kettle-drum rolled and rattled in that arched hall; the trumpet ever and anon brayed out the triumph of the royal pledge; the proud banners of ancestral chivalry trembled aloft with the vibration of the sounds; and all seemed joy and excess of mirth and happiness where regal pomp and military grandeur went hand in hand with the smiles of beauty, the soft strains of floating minstrelsy, feasting, and revelry.

The sharp pangs of remorse, however, are felt by the vicious even amidst their choicest

pleasures. As the night wore on the dark features of the King, during this scene of splendour, bore an anxious and care-worn appearance. He felt that his bearing was remarked by those immediately around, and drained down huge draughts of wine till his brain reeled.

Walter Mauluc, now his equerry, was by his side. He observed the distempered humour of his master; and like the attendant demon of some mortal of whose soul he had made prize, he drew him on to the point he wished to attain.

“Your Highness,” he said, “finds this crowded hall too hot. Suffer me to attend you to the pleasaunce; perhaps a turn or two in the cool night air might revive you.”

“There is a fever in my veins, good Mauluc,” replied the King, “which is only to be allayed by blood. Enough, my friend; you understand me?”

As he said this, at the same time pointing with his finger to the dungeon beneath, the countenance of John presented an expression

of horror which almost startled Mauluc. The equerry pressed nearer to the King's side, and continued the conversation in tones so low that only themselves could hear its import. The King leant back beneath the canopy of costly state as he listened. His dark eye lowered, and then rolled wildly. Suddenly he arose, and, accompanied by Mauluc, who glided after him like his evil genius, he quietly stole from the hall.

Meanwhile, amid the full tide of revelry and enjoyment, the royal absence was scarcely remarked. The jester, Gondibert, alone noticed the flash of the King's jewelled robe as he rose from his throne, turned, and vanished from the hall by a small door situated close behind where he had been sitting. Mauluc cast a stealthy glance around ere he followed; he then as quickly vanished.

As the midnight bell sounded on "unto the drowsy race of night," still continued that scene of revelry in the great hall of the castle of Rouen. The youthful knight shouted, clapped his hands, and pledged the mistress of his

heart; the bearded baron whispered his dark fears of the coming storm in the ear of his neighbour; the gay esquire listened to deeds of fame; whilst minstrels touched the strings of their instruments as they sang the legendary story. The palmer, gaunt and travel-stained, —licensed and cherished even in the halls of royalty for the news he brought,—leant upon his staff, and told the fate of the crusader, perchance to his next of kin; whilst, in the very hour of their enjoyment, “a deed of dreadful note,” fit only for “the dunnest smoke of hell,” was enacting beneath the very apartment of the castle in which they revelled.

CHAPTER XIII.

MURDER MOST FOUL.

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts,
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;
Stop up the access and passage of remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose.

Now, o'er the one-half world
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
The curtain'd sleep; now witchcraft celebrates
Pale Hecate's offerings; and wither'd murder,
Alarum'd by his sentinel the wolf,
Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,
With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design
Moves like a ghost.

SHAKESPERE.

ON that night, whilst the inhabitants of Rouen were for the most part wrapped in slumber, as the waters of the Seine rippled against the walls of the castle, two figures

emerged from a dark postern, and hastily embarked in a small boat. Both were muffled in the long mantle of the period, a garment similar to that worn by the Knight Templars, but without the red cross on the shoulder.

As soon as their craft was unmoored, they pulled close under the shadow of the battlements, until they came to that part of the fortress in which the prisons were situated. They then turned under a low and black-looking arch, whose rusty portcullis constrained them to lower their crests, as they shot into its dark jaws. Here they lay upon their oars for a brief space, whilst they struck a light and ignited a torch they had brought with them. They then turned the prow of their craft down a cavernous tunnel, which ran beneath the fortress, and stopped beside a flight of some half dozen stairs leading into the slimy vaults and dungeons.

After securing their boat, the rower stepped upon the stone stairs and received the torch from his companion. As he held it on high, its lurid glare revealed before him the dark

recesses of the fearful cells with which the place was accommodated ; whilst in rear, its light was reflected in the sable stream ; and as the bearer ascended the flight of steps, and unlocked a door situated a few paces from the top, the glitter of a knight's golden spur was visible beneath his ample garment.

Scarce a word had been uttered by either of the occupants of the boat up to the moment it had been guided into the dismal cavern, which was a secret entrance to the prisons of the condemned, beneath the towers of Rouen. Shaded by the inky cloak of night, with no witness to their fell and cruel purpose, concealed in the cavernous and secret vaults, where they thought no eye could penetrate, John and his vile equerry sought the dungeon of the unhappy Arthur. The Prince was asleep when Mauluc entered his cell. Shaking him by the shoulder, the Knight ordered him, in a hollow voice, to arise and follow.

The hour of the night, and former scenes of horror, filled the unhappy youth with so much terror, that he was at first unable to obey.

There was that, however, in the voice of Mauluc, which plainly indicated to the prisoner that he must make the effort. The Equerry stood with his torch in one hand, the other pointing to the door. Words seemed an effort to him, and his countenance and complexion were those of a livid corpse.

“Whither would you lead me, at this hour?” said the Prince.

“To one whose behest must not be gainsaid,” returned Mauluc.

“Ah, me! my dreaded uncle!” exclaimed Arthur. “O! save me, Sir Knight; save me from his cruel hands.”

“I have neither the power nor the will to do so,” returned Mauluc. “Follow, and plead your cause to himself.”

“Is there, then, no hope of escape?” cried the Prince despairingly. “No pity in man?”

“None,” replied Mauluc sternly, advancing and grasping the collar of the youth’s doublet. “Come forth, I say; I have no time for parley.”

The long continuance of his confinement,

his change from dungeon to dungeon, had so completely subdued the Prince's spirit, that he offered little or no resistance to the insolent Mauluc; but half dragged, half led down the steps which descended from his prison, he was forced into the boat, where stood his unnatural uncle.

A single glance at the lowering features of the King sufficed to show him there was small hope of mercy at his hands. The hollow echo, and reverberation of his own and Mauluc's footsteps, as they stepped into the craft, which contained his bitterest enemy—the flash of the torch-light in the dark waters flowing up the cavernous passage—all filled him with horror. He felt his last hour was come, and that he must die horridly, unnaturally, by the hands of these butchers, and in this dreadful place. All the Plantagenet spirit seemed fled from the Prince, and throwing himself upon his knees, he clutched his uncle's garment and begged for mercy.

“Oh, mine uncle!” he exclaimed; “spare

thy brother's son! Oh, spare thy nephew! Spare thy race*!"

"Arthur of Bretagne!" answered John to this piteous prayer, at the same time drawing his sword, "we offered thee fairly, and thou refusedst our proffered love. 'Tis now too late to plead for mercy at our hands. Leave thy grasp upon our tunic."

"Oh, for dear God's sake, uncle," again pleaded Arthur, "as you hope for mercy in Heaven hereafter, kill me not in this dreadful place."

"Hence, fool!" said John, drawing back his arm. "Pluck him, Sir Walter, from my feet."

Mauluc drew the Prince suddenly backward, and the King in an instant plunged his weapon into the body of the unhappy youth.

The Prince uttered a piercing shriek, and struggled to rise from the bottom of the boat. But the King placed his foot upon his

* John had no children at this time by Isabella of Angoulême, so that when he had murdered Arthur, he was (for the time) the sole representative of the heroic race of Plantagenet.

breast, and thrusting him down, again and again struck the weapon through him as he lay.

A deep groan sounded along the vault, and all was over. The unhappy Arthur, deluged in blood, lay a corpse in the boat.

No sooner was the deed executed, than the guilty pair were seized with dread. The end was attained which John had so long worked for, and had been unable to compass except by himself becoming the butcher of an innocent child; for even the dark Mauluc, although promised the heiress of Mulgrief as the assassin's fee, shrank from perpetration of the deed. He had urged on the King to its commission, and even brought him to the secret prison-house of the Prince in order to imbrue his hands in blood; but he was too wary to be himself the executor of the villanous act. He too well knew the nature of his employer. For the moment, the pair stood aghast, and listened to the echo of the dripping water, as it fell, drop by drop, from the damp roof and sides of the cavern. The noise of the death-

struggle had subsided into the deep silence of the vaults; and the eyes of both the assassins were, for the moment, rivetted upon the corpse of the Prince. Suddenly a sound, as of some one upon the steps of the dungeon, recalled them to themselves.

“Hark!” said Mauluc, turning suddenly; “what sounds were those?” As he looked towards the landing which led to the prisons he beheld a dark shadow upon the walls. The next moment, he plunged the torch he held into the stream, and they were enveloped in utter darkness.

“Haste!” exclaimed John, in mental terror, and seizing one of the oars, “pull, good Walter. Let us leave this place of death. I feel oppressed, as if breathing the close vapours of hell. Pull for the open river, Sir Knight, for the love of Heaven.”

Mauluc, nothing loth to leave the dismal vault, endeavoured to find the oar. As he did so, his hand encountered the gory body of the murdered Prince. He shuddered as he felt the warm blood; and clutching the oar with

trembling hands, pulled for the stream. The guilty pair felt their courage revive as they found themselves again in the clear air, and beneath the canopy of heaven.

A heavy stone had been prepared by Mauluc, by passing a strong cord over it. This, with tremulous haste, they fastened around the dead body of the Prince, with some little difficulty heaving it over the side of the boat into the depths of the Seine. The corpse plunged heavily into the dark waters, and sank to the bottom, whilst the murderers watched for a few moments the bubbles which arose upon the surface.

“Thus perish all record of this night’s business,” said John, drawing a long breath.

“And so perish all your Highness’s cares,” added Mauluc.

The pair then once more seized the oars, and hastily rowed to the spot from whence they had started on this fearful enterprise.

Vain, however, are the deepest-laid schemes of man. The All-wise Being permits not the

devices of the villanous to be hidden from the open world :—

“ Foul deeds will rise,

Though all the world o'erwhelm them to men's eyes.”

Their hands, trembling with guilt and horror, had failed to secure the cord which attached the stone to the dead body, and ere they themselves had well landed, it rose again to the surface, and, before morning dawned, was washed on shore on the opposite side of the river.

Meanwhile, John and his companion landed stealthily on the little quay which was situate at the private stairs leading from the water-tower of the castle; and in order to obliterate, as they thought, all trace of their night's excursion, they scuttled with their swords the small craft, and sank her. They then hastened into the castle, and shutting themselves up in the King's private apartment, spent the remainder of the night in terror, afraid to separate until the rising dawn somewhat repaired their conscience-stricken souls.

Sir Walter Mauluc vainly imagined he had at least so well arranged matters that no suspicion of their intent could arise, and that by perpetrating the deed in the darkness and secrecy of the vaults beneath the castle, no prying eye could by possibility glance at their proceedings. Such, however, was not to be the case; for a dark suspicion of the King's intent had lain like a weight upon the mind of the Jester Gondibert, ever since Hubert had possessed him with the recent atrocities perpetrated upon the Prince whilst a prisoner at Falaise.

Gondibert had accordingly registered a vow at the altar to save the Prince if possible, and had spared no pains to discover his whereabouts during the short time he had sojourned at Rouen. Had any of the usual jailers of the castle been employed in the safe custody of the Prince, the quick wit of the Jester might, perhaps, have discovered the ill-fated Arthur, and assisted in his escape. As it was, the wily Gondibert had been baffled in all his attempts. On this eventful night, however, he

had learned that some unhappy prisoner was confined in a place called the Water-Tower—one of the most dismal prisons of the fortress of Rouen; and the captive thus carefully concealed, he immediately concluded to be the unhappy Prince. It was only on the morning of the murder that Gondibert had satisfied himself of this, and he resolved to attempt the deliverance of the captive during the feast. Accordingly, observing the departure of John and Mauluc, by virtue of the signet-ring he had received from the minstrel, he passed into the lonely vaults beneath the castle. He came, however, too late to save, although not too late to witness, the horrid scene we have described; and it was the shadow of his figure, as he escaped horror-stricken from behind the abutment where he had concealed himself, that Mauluc had remarked when he extinguished the torch in the stream.

Struck with terror at what he had just witnessed, Gondibert resolved to fly from a place which contained wretches capable of so dreadful a deed, and, hardly knowing whither

he bent his steps, he rushed down to the water-side, threw himself into a boat, and crossing the stream entered the Abbey of Bec, whilst the monks were engaged at a midnight mass.

Gondibert had no great opinion of the clergy of his time, knowing rather too much of their vagaries, and the luxurious lives they oftentimes led. At the present moment, however, as he thought he might experience some sort of consolation and relief from holy counsel, he resolved to seek benefit of clergy, and by a full confession of all he had witnessed, relieve his mind.

"Oh! holy Father Abbot," he said, advancing and throwing himself upon his knees, before the Superior of the establishment, "receive the confession of one of the wicked."

"What heavy sin thus moves thee, my son?" inquired the Abbot. "thou art not wont to be thus perturbed."

"Man was born in sin," replied Gondibert; "and were the lives only of the most innocent of us prolonged, I am persuaded it would be quickly necessary again to drown or to burn the world; for earth would become a hell

Listen, Reverend Father, and judge for yourself."

The Abbot of Bec recoiled with horror, as he listened to the recital of the startled Gondibert. "Holy St. Agatha! patron saint of my convent," he said; "but what a dreadful tale is this thou hast related! Thou surely art wandering from the truth, good man, and putting a jest upon me. But no; thy pallid and scared look is voucher for thy good faith. Yet can I hardly believe such villany to exist in the heart of a king."

The Jester spent some hours with the portly abbot after this confession. His mind had been so much unhinged by the terrible deed he had witnessed, that it required all the consolation that holy man could afford, to tranquillize his perturbed spirit. In fact, the churchman began shrewdly to suspect, from the violent manner in which Gondibert called up all the saints in the calendar to do vengeance upon the King and his vile accomplice, that it was

not altogether impossible the whole matter might be the coinage of the Jester's over-heated brain.

Under this idea, and impressing upon Gondibert the propriety of not giving utterance to his indignation, lest there might be some mistake in the matter, the abbot led him to the gates of the convent, and was about to dismiss him at the river's bank, when, as if in confirmation of the Jester's words, and as though Heaven had cast up its own witness, the swollen body of the murdered Prince was thrown on shore by the waves, at their very feet*.

* The Monks of Margan mentioned in their brief yearly notes, that "although the body of the murdered Prince had been thrown into the Seine, with heavy stones fastened to it, yet that it was, notwithstanding, cast on shore, and secretly buried, for fear of the tyrant."

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